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NEW YORK
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A CONQUERING HEROINE

A CONQUERING HEROINE

BY
"THE DUCHESS" ps. 07
(MRS. HUNGERFORD)

AUTHOR OF
"AIRY FAIRY LILIAN," "LADY BRANKSMERE," "MOLLY BAWN,"
"PHYLLIS," "ROSSMOYNE," ETC.

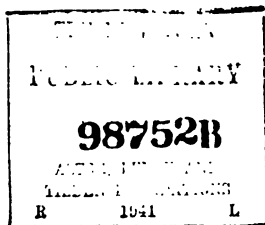
Hungerford.
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UNION SQUARE +

1892

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A CONQUERING HEROINE.

CHAPTER I.

“The present being a peculiar case,
Each with unwonted zeal the other scouted.
Looked scorn too nicely shaded to be shouted,
And with each inch of person and of vesture
Contrived to hint some most disdainful gesture.”

“It is quite exciting!” says Miss Ruthven, in her clear, metallic voice, that, as a rule, sets everybody’s teeth on edge. It is *so* clear, *so* distinct—each syllable so beyond doubt.

She leans back in her chair as she says this, not in the comfortable manner of most

people who love their cushions, but slowly, methodically, and looks at her tea. There is nothing to do with it, *except* look at it, or drink it; to stir it would be a monstrous absurdity, as she takes neither cream nor sugar.

“Yes! isn’t it?” says a little pretty blonde girl, starting forward. “Exciting! That is just the word.”

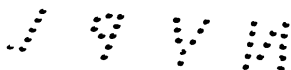
“Well, I am not sure about that,” says Miss Ruthven, turning her handsome face—a face cold, calm, set as a cameo, but certainly handsome—toward the last speaker.

“Oh, yes, it is—it is indeed!” says the little, fair girl, eagerly. “Fancy—an Irish girl!”

Here one of the men standing round the fire laughs.

“One would think you never heard of an Irish girl before,” says he.

He is a big man, with scanty, rather red-



dish hair, and eyes in which the predominating brown has a tinge of red through it too. For the rest, his mouth is too large and too suggestive to inspire respect, and his nose is a trifle hooked.

“Oh! Lord Luxford! How absurd! Of *course* I have heard of Ireland,” says the blonde, giving him a gleaming smile that shows to the utmost advantage all her lovely little white teeth. “But——” Theodosia Gascoigne pauses, and looks a little vaguely round her—in most ways she is a little vague at times. “But——”

“Yes?” says Luxford—he is smiling at her now, but his smile is scarcely as pleasant as the one she has given him. There is a little cruelty in the *waiting* of it—the delight in the girl’s perplexity—in her inability to explain herself.

“Oh! you know,” says she, with some slight confusion.

"'Pon my word, I don't," says he. "Couldn't you begin all over again? Come now, Miss Theo——!"

"I don't see what she's got to explain," breaks in Miss Ruthven, not with the design of shielding Theo, but with a determination to let her own voice be heard. "We all think it so odd of Lady Ingram to——"

She is interrupted here.

"Oh! not odd—say delightful!" murmurs a soft voice from the depths of a cosey armchair. The owner of the voice so far gives in to the moment as to raise herself and let a charming face look out from the depths of her surroundings. Mrs. Gaveston—a widow of some years' standing, though still comparatively young (she herself would have taken out that begrudging word "comparatively"). She turns to a man standing close to her chair. "Nothing like *fresh material*. You agree with me, Mr. Frewman?"

"Eh?" says Mr. Frewman, a young old man, buried behind huge spectacles. His "Eh?" is eloquent of a disknowledge of all that has been going on—of her question—everything. "Yes." He bends over her, more perhaps with a view of seeing her through his spectacles than devotion, though certainly there is a touch of the latter in his air. "Yes. Yes. Yes, certainly. I agree with you."

"Ah! I knew you would," says the widow, sweetly. "It *will* be delightful to see a real live Irish girl close at hand. Quite a study, eh?"

"Quite, quite," says the Professor, feverishly. "What *is* she talking about?"

"She's a cousin of Auntie's," says Theodosia.

"Yes—a cousin," says her brother, a young man who is standing at a distant window. He is a tall, well-set-up young

man, with a somewhat satirical mouth. "Cousins are dangerous!" says he, caressing the little dog he holds, a tiny, black thing, a great favorite with his aunt—by marriage—and hostess, Lady Ingram.

"I can't think why she has asked her here," says Miss Ruthven, in a distinctly offended tone. "She says she hates ill-assorted house parties, and here we all are as comfortable as possible. Why then introduce a disturbing element?"

"Why not introduce an amusing element?" asks Mrs. Gaveston, pleasantly—who, as a fact, doesn't care who comes or goes, so long as she is sure of her intellectual evenings with her Professor.

"Oh! you may talk as you like, Edith," says Theodosia. "But to have a perfect stranger flung into our midst! It will upset everything."

By everything, she means the delightful

arrangements so far existing—the arrangements that have thrown her into Lord Luxford's company day by day.

“ True ! ” says Claudia Ruthven, thoughtfully. If ever she is to bring Gerald Gascoigne—the promising young *attaché* in the window, now fondling Lady Ingram's dog)—to book, it will be during this visit. Claudia, though handsome and an heiress, was younger five years ago than she is now ! “ The idea of asking a wild Irish girl here ! ” says she, half contemptuously, half wrathfully.

“ Would you have preferred a wild Irishman ? ” asks Gascoigne, glancing back at her from the window, where, between the intervals employed in alternately teasing and petting the little dog, he is watching the steady downfall of the snow.

“ Well, perhaps so ! ” Claudia Ruthven's smiles are few and far between, but now she

casts one at Gascoigne, that he accepts very graciously. He smiles back at her, and even while smiling thoughts run quickly through his mind. Yes, she is rich, and not bad-looking and the grand-daughter of an earl! She could push him—and an *attaché*, however well connected, without money——Yes, it is worth thinking about. His smile grows warmer. “A man is never as tiresome as a girl!”

“How true,” says Theodosia, who always agrees with everyone—especially with Claudia. “And where is this girl coming from—what county, I mean?”

“Cork,” says Gascoigne.

“Oh! Cork!” says Lord Luxford, with an affected groan. “Couldn’t be worse! Galway, now—if it had been even Galway—or Meath. West Meath isn’t bad. There *are* some decent people in West Meath, I believe. *Some* poor devils who can’t afford to

live anywhere else, of course. But quite respectable, I'm told."

"Who told you?" asks Miss Ruthven, in a distinctly disbelieving tone.

"Oh! I don't know. Dicky Dalton, for one. He was hunting there one season, and——"

"Dicky's a fool!" says Mrs. Gaveston, in her soft sort of way.

"*You* should know," says Luxford, looking at her with a quizzical air. It was notorious in their set that there had been passages between "Dicky" and the pretty widow last season in town. Mrs. Gaveston laughs, and shakes her fan at him.

"But Cork!" says Claudia, in a disgusted tone. "Who ever knew anybody who lived *there*? Cork! How impossible it sounds."

"Where is it?" asks Theodosia, in her sweet treble. "North or south?"

"North, I think."

“South, I am positive,” says Mrs. Gaveston.

“Which is it?” demands Claudia, a little imperiously. She hates being contradicted, even in the smallest matters. She appeals to Gascoigne. As a fact, they all appeal to Gascoigne when occasion arises. There is a sort of universal-knowledge air about him that makes one naturally turn to him. A smart young *attaché* of eight-and-twenty, decidedly well-thought-of in influential circles, and with unbounded confidence in himself, he has so far walked through the world with a high head and a light heart. (To him life seems full of delightful possibilities. Once started on his diplomatic career, who can say to what heights he may not reach?)—And if a little money could be got—His eyes are handsome enough to have *made him* a few friends, his mouth satirical *enough to have made him* many enemies!

"South, I rather think," says he, languidly, pulling the dog's ears. "But really, after all, what does it matter—north or south? It's only Ireland, you know."

There is a touch of satire in his tone; his eyes are on the dog.

"Oh, yes! everything matters," says Mrs. Gaveston, in a rather piqued tone. She doesn't like Gascoigne.

"Well, it certainly *is* south," says Lord Luxford. "They call it 'Cark' themselves."

"They are *quite* uncivilized," says Miss Ruthven.

"I met a Cork man once," says Gascoigne, slowly.

"What?"

"No! Really?"

They all once more turn in his direction.

CHAPTER II.

“This, I perceive, has been your occupation ;
You should have been more usefully employed ! ”

“REALLY, Gerald?” asks Theodosia, breathlessly. She leans toward him. There is intense excitement all round among the women.

“Yes, really,” says her brother, with a laugh. “One would think, as Luxford suggested, you never heard of Ireland before, yet this girl who is coming must be a sort of cousin of ours too.”

“Oh ! never mind the girl,” said Claudia, scornfully, “We shall have too much of her presently, I’ve no doubt.”

Gascoigne looks at her and shrugs his *shoulders*.

"Oh! I beg your pardon," says Claudia, flushing hotly. "Of course—as you say—a sort of cousin—but, you know, we are not responsible for our cousins, and——"

"You will make allowances for her?" says Gascoigne, with a smile. "That we shall all have to do, I suppose."

"Oh, but *do* go on. Tell us about your 'Cark' man?" says Mrs. Gaveston, impatiently. "You met him?"

"Once."

"Yes. And? Well? *Do* go on! Was he odd?"

"That goes without saying," says Claudia, with fine contempt.

"Of course. But—out of the way odd, I mean. How did he speak?"

"Did he call it 'Cark'?" asks Luxford, who is laughing. "Do say he did, if only to put me in the right."

"What did he look like? Unkempt?"

"What did he *say*?" asks Mrs. Gaveston, with decision.

"It was a mere passing remark," returns Gascoigne, always stroking the little dog, who is now going to sleep beneath his touch, as though mesmerized by it. "But I remember it. It struck me as forcible."

"Oh, I daresay! Those dreadful people in the House are—I've heard—*very* forcible! They incline to blows almost. And his remark—it was——?"

"'Git out, ye dirthy blagguard!'"

Consternation!

"Oh, Gerald!" says his sister, faintly.

"Good Heavens!" says Mrs. Gaveston, sitting bolt upright. "*What?* He called you *that*?"

"Horrid wretch!" says Claudia, with deep sympathy, and as *sotto voce* as will allow her voice to be distinctly heard.

"*Well—no—no.* Not me! He didn't

call *me* that ! It was another acquaintance of his to whom he gave that distinguished title."

" Oh ! those Irish ! " says Mrs. Gaveston, falling back in her chair, and raising her fan languidly between her faultless complexion and the fire. " Very backward race, don't you think, Professor ? " raising carefully shaded eyes to his.

" There have been a few who have distinguished themselves," begins the Professor, nervously ; he is, as a rule, unhappy and ill at ease out of his own study. " Wolseley, Roberts, Lord Dufferin, the Duke of Well——"

" Tut ! nonsense ! We aren't talking of them," says the widow, gayly. " They were mistakes—on the right side, I grant you. But from all I've read about the Irish at home, they—well," with an arch smile and a shake of her handsome head, " they *are* ! "

"I've not gone into it," says the Professor. "It is hardly in my line" (his line leads him into tombs); "but it seems to me that there is undoubted talent—if a good deal of—of——"

"Savagery?"

"I think I was going to say frivolity," says the Professor, in a tone of apology. "But the talent is certainly there. I have had a skull or two under my notice, and——"

"Oh! Professor! you frighten me," cries the widow, shrinking behind her fan. "A nasty skull! And a nasty, *Irish* skull, too! Oh! you shouldn't! you" —reappearing again, and tapping him on the arm —"you really *shouldn't*, you know. We have our nerves, we poor creatures!"

"Just think!" says Claudia, curling her *well-formed* lips. "That is what they call

a gentleman in Ireland. Why he would be kicked out of any club here."

"What was it he said?" cries the widow, pressing forward again. "Dirty—dirty—Oh! it is not to be repeated. And so this was your one gentleman from Cork, Mr. Gascoigne?"

"Well—n-o-o! I don't think, after all, he was a gentleman—exactly! At least, not according to our regulations," says Gascoigne, slowly, dreamily, as one in search of an honest description of the person under fire.

"A what, then?" demands Mrs. Gaveston, sharply, who always distrusts Gascoigne, and the more whenever she sees that blank look upon his face. He has given her cause for thought once or twice.

"He was a crossing-sweeper," says he now, mildly. "A very soiled crossing-sweeper, with hardly any clothes to signify:

and he was addressing his dog. A most lively animal! He jumped up against my trousers, and I——”

“Nonsense!” interrupts Mrs. Gaveston, indignantly. “I really wish you would spare *us* at least your touches of humor!”

Her pretty brow is considerably ruffled, as she leans back in her chair, and she furls and unfurls her fan with suspicious haste.

“Humor! The humor was all his,” says Gascoigne, unmoved. “The humor belonged to the Cork man that you wanted so much to hear about.”

“We didn’t want to hear about a cross-ing-sweeper,” says his sister, angrily, in spite of the fact that Lord Luxford is roaring with laughter—so is the Professor; the joke has even penetrated as far as the clever brain of that learned young-old man.

Claudia alone, although boiling with *resentment*, remains smooth and smiling.

"The dog jumped on you?" says she. "What a graphic sketch! The old Irishman and the muddy dog jumping on your clean trousers. One can see it! What a charm to be able with a word or two to put a whole picture—an entire story—before one. But you left out something," lifting her eyes to his with an admiring smile; "what *you* did then! I can imagine it!" She makes a little gesture with her slim, white hand—a very suggestive one, that would certainly have raised a howl in any dog against which her hand had come. "That would add life to your picture," says she (and indeed it would)—"you should have put that in. It would complete it. You gave the dog *that*, eh?" She is so delighted with her own sparkle of wit that she repeats the gesture.

"I don't quite gather what 'that' is," says Gascoigne, who though he has quite

made up his mind to marry her, and further his career with her money, still can never refrain from being a little nasty to her now and then ; “ I gave the dog a shilling. Is that what you meant ? ”

The second that it takes Claudia to long to box his ears is hardly noticeable before she breathes sweetly :

“ How generous ! how *like* you ! ”

Gascoigne turns away impatiently. After all *she* had scored ; to be outdone is detestable to him ! And yet—what a wife she would make for a Cabinet Minister !

Meantime the others have been talking of the all-absorbing topic.

“ What’s her name ? ” asks Mrs. Gaves-ton.

“ I don’t know,” says Theodosia, who indeed had only arrived at The Barn a week ago, and so is hardly as well up in the news *of the coming* guest as her brother, who has

been staying here for the last three weeks. Besides, Auntie (Lady Ingram) had said so little to her about this forty-first cousin. It had occurred to her this morning, however, that Auntie was a little troubled about the coming of her new guest! "What *is* her name, Gerald?"

"Bridget," says he. "The——" He is evidently going to say something more, but checks himself.

"Bridget! What an extraordinary name!" Claudia's voice sinks. "We had a scullery maid once—that was her name!"

"Suitable, quite suitable, no doubt. Poor Lady Ingram," says Mrs. Gaveston.

"Yes! Auntie will feel it," says Theodosia, softly sighing.

"Never mind," says Mrs. Gascoigne, pressing the girl's little fragile hand. "Perhaps she won't be so *very* bad after all."

"I sha'n't go out, even when the frost clears off," says he, sinking into the low chair beside her and laughing a little. "*Then* you'll be all right."

"Ah! you take too much for granted," says the girl, throwing up her head with an attempt at dignity that amuses him. She has revolted in spite of herself from his manner, which is always a little vulgar, and now decidedly in bad taste.

"Do I?" says he. He leans toward her. "Do I?" His handsome, insolent face is close to hers, his voice is compelling. He knows the strange fascination he has for her, and relentlessly, deliberately, he uses it for his own amusement. He may marry her—he may not. Looking at her now, it occurs to him that he may.

"Ah! no!" says she in a mere whisper. Her eyes as they lift themselves to his, are *half-frightened*, half-warm with delight. Her

lips are tremulous. At this moment she tells herself that she is glad to own him as her master.

Meanwhile conversation with the others is still surging round the coming visitor. Lady Ingram is absent, having been called away to attend to the comfort of some sick villager, and Sir William is seldom visible in the drawing-room at this hour; "The afternoon tea-fight," as he calls it, being a wearying of the flesh to him.

"How is she a cousin of Lady Ingram's?" asks Mrs. Gaveston of Gascoigne.

"Through her father, I believe," returns he, briefly. He is always a young man of few words.

"Her father! A petty squire no doubt," says Claudia, in a low tone to Mrs. Gaveston, who moves her fan so as to hide her lips, and whispers back:

"Pray Heaven not a petty solicitor ! Who *was* Lady Ingram, any way ?"

"*I* don't know," says Claudia, with immense disbelief in her hostess's social position prior to her marriage. "Sir William is a good deal older than *she* is."

"Ah ! that accounts for it, no doubt," says the widow. "'Crabbed age and youth.'"

"Crabbed age at all events (that is, Sir William) decided that they should dwell together."

"After all, it's a *shame* to talk of her like that," says Mrs. Gaveston, who has some honest qualms, and holds a few of the old views that declare that a man should not partake of his neighbor's salt and then abuse him. "She is charming. And if Sir William *is* a few years older, it is not so altogether out of the way as most marriages."

"How you pose !" says Claudia, leaning *back, with a sneer*. "As for me, I say

nothing beyond this, that the house will be insupportable when this girl comes."

"That will be in about twenty minutes!" says Mrs. Gaveston, with a glance at the clock. "I say, I hope Lady Ingram will be back in time."

"How she worries over those old people!" contemptuously.

"Well—she's a *good* woman," says Mrs. Gaveston. "There's no cant about her. She means it! I sometimes" (with an affected little laugh as if ashamed of herself) "wish I could feel like that—but I can't. They're so dirty—the poor—and I *hate* dirt. Twenty minutes! I——" She pauses, throws back her head, and laughs gayly—"I can *see* her as she arrives! A dull heavy mackintosh hanging round her, a draggled skirt, her hair all lying in frightful rats' tails upon her forehead, her hat awry. Her whole air one mass of confusion."

“ Oh ! yes. I am sure she will amuse us,” says Claudia, delightedly. Her cold eyes brighten. It is clear to Mrs. Gayeston that she is luxuriating in the thought of enjoying the discomfiture of the new-comer, and that—having some kindly touches in her nature—annoys her.

“ It was a mere imaginary picture,” says she. “ Don’t dwell on it. And I may be quite mistaken ! You should provide yourself against disappointment.”

“ Disappointment ! ” says Claudia, with some anger.

“ Oh, I daresay she’ll amuse us,” says the widow, declining to take up the glove. “ Perhaps, after all—we shall even like her. She may prove an acquisition ! ”

She turns away from Claudia, who often wearies her—as a person without a single grain of humor—and leans back in her seat *evidently charmed* with her own attitude.

It describes so perfectly the broader, the unprejudiced view ! The girl *may* be presentable. Probably—*most* probably—she will not ! But, however it goes, they must all remember that she, Edith Gaveston, had given a bean in her favor.

As she leans back she encounters the Professor's eyes ; they are warm, admiring. Evidently he had heard the whole discussion. The Professor is a Liberal to his fingers' ends, and Mrs. Gaveston, after a second glance at him, knows she has scored a point.

The Professor has pushed up his spectacles—a sure sign of interest in him.

It has been Mrs. Gaveston's aim through life—that is, since life has assumed larger and pleasanter proportions to her—to be thought clever, or, at all events, to be mixed up with clever people. Mr. Frewman, called by his intimates the Professor, is ad-

mirably clever. He has for quite five years contributed to all the best papers. The *Contemporary* covets him. The *Fortnightly* welcomes him. To him the *Nineteenth Century* holds out its arms. Already he is a light in the world of science, and one looked up to by the *crème de la crème* of that inner circle.

Though still a young man, comparatively speaking (about her own age, in fact, though she would have put the date of her birth a few years after his), though still a young man about thirty-five or so, he has so managed as to look sixty. This at once will show how clever he is! Almost anybody, nowadays, can make themselves look young, but to make one's self old!—the very courage of it! Truly, thinks Mrs. Gaveston, the Professor is a great man.

Not that poor Mr. Frewman, after all, *means* anything, except a disregard for

fashionable clothes, and the most unqualified dislike to the matutinal tub. His spectacles, too, are of a most abnormal size, and render him a few degrees more hideous than Nature (who must have had the gout when he was born) intended.

But learning, like charity, covers a multitude of sins—and a good deal of soiled linen.

Mrs. Gaveston, though the daintiest creature alive, condones the Professor's clothes, and soothes herself with the reflection that, once married to him, it will be the simplest thing in the world to remove his shirt at night, so that he perforce must put on a clean one in the morning. She has money, nothing very much out of the way, but still a tempting bait for a man like Frewman, whose struggles toward fame leave him at times a good deal an open, unprotected prey to the four winds of heaven. To live on ar-

ticles supplied to the papers, however rich in matter, is hardly to feel rich where one's banking account is concerned—is not, in fact, to be a Dives off-hand.

Mrs. Gaveston has gleaned enough of Frewman's affairs to know so much, to know, too, that there is a future before him, with her money, and his talent. Already she sees a literary salon rising before her, of which he should be the chief, of course, but she, his wife, the presiding genius! There would not in effect be either a superior or inferior in *her* salon. He would rule by right of his intellect. She would rule by right of her charm. Yes! It would be the most successful salon in town—next season.

She has already arranged the date of her second marriage.

At this moment Lady Ingram enters the *room*.

CHAPTER III.

“Thy voice is like a fountain,
Leaping up in clear moonshine ;
Silver, silver, ever mounting,
Ever sinking,
Without thinking,
To that brimful heart of thine.
Every sad and happy feeling
Thou hast had in bygone years,
Through thy lips come stealing—stealing——”

“THEY’LL be here directly,” says she, glancing at the clock. “What’s the hour, Theo?”

“Twenty to six.”

“Dear me, how time flies. Yet I knew it must be late. Ring for fresh tea, dear, and hot cakes and——”

“*The tea is all right, I think,*” says Theo,

carelessly, laying a dainty finger-tip upon the teapot.

“ Oh ! Impossible. *Ring*, dear,” always as sweetly as possible, but with the air of one accustomed to be obeyed. “ I’m so sorry,” looking all round her with a smiling kindly glance that includes everyone, “ that I had to be away so long from you all, but,” shrugging her shoulders, “ my old women are sometimes so troublesome, and, of course, because I wanted to be home specially early to-day to receive them, Mrs. Millikins kept me quite half an hour talking of her daughter’s new place.”

Perhaps she thinks she is abusing her old women, but if so, she is egregiously astray ! The smile on her kindly lips is full of warmth and affection. Those old women of hers, who seem to lie like flies all over her husband’s property, are dear to her. *They stand* to her indeed in lieu of the chil-

dren that the Lord in His knowledge has denied her, and who would have been so infinitely precious.

Happy old women ! There are none of their class in the United Kingdom so carefully cared for as Lady Ingram's.

As to Lady Ingram herself, she is plain, if one counts by features. Indeed, there is scarcely a feature in her face that is not faulty. Yet it is a face to remember—to think on—to love.

To take the least good thing in it first, breeding is stamped on each irregular feature—breeding that laughs at irregularities and shows itself as distinctly in the ugly types as in the beautiful ! There is no mistaking it ! But above and beyond the mere accident of birth there is in Lady Ingram's face that one sweet, unpurchasable, most perfect breeding of all—the breeding that comes from a good heart !

From this arises all the courtesy, the kindness, the gentleness, the humility that makes the Christian. Lady Ingram is that *best* thing!

"Do you know," says Lady Ingram, laughing, "I feel quite nervous about the coming of this new guest of mine—this little cousin."

Expressive glances from Theo to Claudia, that mean, "No wonder! poor thing!"

"She is quite my nearest relation on earth. Isn't that strange? The only child of an only child, I have had few people belonging to me. Bridget's father was a first cousin of my mother's."

A sound from one of the men at the window startles them.

"I see the dog-cart," says Lord Luxford, lazily.

"Really? Really?" cries Lady Ingram, going, with some excitement, to

the window. "Oh! yes—that must be she!"

"And the other?" asks Gascoigne, who too is gazing at the swiftly-approaching trap. "Another cousin?"

"I suppose so," laughing. "But so very distant a one that I hardly dare to claim him."

At the word "him" Theo, Claudia, and the widow rise to their feet and with one accord seek the second window; the third does not overlook the drive.

"He'll soon be a near one," says Gascoigne, screwing his glass into his eye. "Capital horses, by Jove! And how he drives them!" There is a begrudging admiration in his eye.

"All Irishmen can drive," says Lady Ingram. "He is Bridget's second cousin, and heir to the title. Her father, Lord Connaghmore, has no son."

Lord Connaghmore! The three women at the second window regard each other with a searching glance.

Bridget! The despised Bridget is the daughter of a baron at the very *least!* In a second Mrs. Gaveston and Claudia have ceased to question each other's eyes, but have concentrated their four upon Theo.

"I *assure* you, I knew nothing—nothing," says Theo, understanding the silent question.

"You know it is only quite a little time ago since I met Auntie, and she has never said a word to me about her people, and I never cared to make inquiries. I never thought of it! Just *fancy* this horrid girl being so—so—respectable."

"The cousin will be Lord Connaghmore!" says Claudia, in a smothered tone, and with a swift, irrepressible glance toward Gascoigne.

"Yes—the cousin will have a title," says Mrs. Gaveston, dreamily.

Here the sound of approaching footsteps being heard outside, mingled with the pleasant laugh of Lady Ingram (who has gone out to meet and welcome her unknown relatives), scatters them all. The women hurry back to the tea-table, and contrive at a second's notice to look as natural as possible; the men, who have withdrawn from the other window, are standing staring at the door, quite oblivious of the decency to be observed on these occasions.

And now the door is thrown open, and Lady Ingram comes in, beaming, smiling, delighted, leading a tall, happy-looking girl by the arm.

"This is Bridget!" says she in a tone of exquisite pleasure, leading her up to Theo. There is the most genuine delight and pleasure in her voice.

"I hope you are not too tired after your dreadful journey?" says Theo, rising languidly, and giving Bridget a tiny little hand.

"Tired! I'm never tired!" says Bridget, in a sweet, clear, ringing, beautiful voice, unmistakably Irish, but cultured and low and sweet, that vibrates through the room. It brings the eyes of the three men near the fire still more intently on her, though, indeed, they had been quite sufficiently riveted before that. Of this fact, the man who walks up the room behind Bridget, and who has become quite accustomed to Bridget's triumphal entrances, is quite aware.

"And as for the journey," says Bridget, "it isn't dreadful at all. Quite ordinary. A little thing in comparison with a journey to France or Italy. Have you ever been to Ireland?" Her question is presumably to Theo, but Bridget has lifted her wondrous *eyes* and let them roam carelessly from man

to man as they stand on the hearth-rug. She has taken no heed of the women.

“Never!” says the Professor as the gaze meets him. His tone is like an explosion. As a rule he seldom talks at all, and still seldomer to women.

“Twice,” says Lord Luxford, ardently, as his turn comes. He says it quickly, eagerly. It occurs to him for the first time, what a jolly lucky thing it is that he *has* been in Ireland. He can talk to her about it—sympathize. It suggests itself to him at once that he has always hated his own country on account of the way they have sat upon “Ould Oireland.”

“I am going there almost immediately—in the autumn. The autumn’s the best time, isn’t it?” says the *attaché*, shifting his glass from one eye to the other with a wild hope of seeing her better.

“Bridget, let me introduce you to my

friends," says Lady Ingram, in her sweet way. "Theo you know already—I have written to you about her. And this is Mrs. Gaveston, a great friend of mine——"

Here Mrs. Gaveston gives Bridget's hand the tenderest squeeze, and murmurs something (presumably) beautiful, in the way of welcome. It is too indistinct, however, to be understood, and might as well have been an anathema as a blessing, for all that is heard of it. When her little speech finishes, she darts a glance at the Professor that is hardly likely to improve his digestion if he sees it. But Providence is regarding that learned man. The Professor's eyes are riveted on Bridget, so that Mrs. Gaveston's baleful glance falls harmless.

"And this is Miss Ruthven — Claudia Ruthven," says kindly Lady Ingram. "I *hope* all you girls will call each other by *your Christian* names at once. It is so much

more pleasant—and especially as I feel sure you will be friends.”

Claudia gives Bridget a little frosty bow, and then a frostier hand-shake.

Bridget laughs. She gives Claudia's unwilling hand the warmest little pressure—an extravagantly warm little pressure, indeed, and looking back to where a tall young man, very handsome and distinguished-looking, is standing behind her, laughs again—at him.

“You have forgotten Terence!” says she, smiling at Lady Ingram.

The latter starts, and laying her hand upon the girl's arm, looks remorsefully at Terence Blake.

“I *had* forgotten!” says she. “But Bridget's coming—I had thought so much about it—I——”

“You needn't say a word,” says the handsome young man, with a sort of dry

amusement in his eyes. "I am quite accustomed to be forgotten when Bridget is on view—so are most people!"

This little rider to his first speech is received with distinct disfavor by the women, with considerable thought by the men. It leads the latter to a fresh examination of Bridget's features.

CHAPTER IV.

“ O, sweetest face of all the faces
About my way,
A light for night and lonely places,
A day in day ! ”

THERE is nothing extraordinary about them after all, now that they have looked. The eyes are *not* like stars, the nose would have disgraced any Greek goddess, the mouth resembles anything in the world but Cupid's bow, and the hair hasn't a thought in common with the sun's rays. It is indeed dark, if anything.

And yet—and yet ! was there ever any living being so lovely—so perfect as Bridget O'Neill ?

Yes, “ perfect ” is the word. From the

crown of her lovely little head to the points of her exquisite feet she is perfect all through. There is a light in the merry, saucy, tender, bewitching dark blue eyes that drags one to her willy-nilly, and once drawn, one stays—undone forever !

“ From the glance of her eye
Shun danger and fly,
For fatal's the glance of Kate Kearney.”

As fatal is the glance of Bridget ! It is such a wonderfully kind glance that it disarms suspicion, and the unfortunate young man who—charmed by the sweet friendliness of it—advances boldly to her, finds all too soon that he has rushed on his own destruction, a destruction from which there is no drawing back ! It is so terribly easy to fall in love with Bridget—so terribly difficult to forget that you have loved her.

For Bridget is a siren ! Not only does

she draw all men to her, but when drawn she gives them nothing in return. Nothing sustaining, at all events. Kind words, kind smiles, delightful little glances—that is all. And for a man once on the fatal road, that leads to love of Bridget, such sweet but cold courtesies are too altogether insufficient.

She is not tall, but she is tall enough to be graceful, and all her limbs seem to have acquired to themselves every grace in the world. She moves like a young goddess, with a freedom, a very joy of living, that is delightful for the one who has the good fortune to look upon it.

She moves now toward the cousin behind her, and says tranquilly, with a little breath of reproach in the soft, musical Irish voice :

“ Now, Terence, now ! Is that kind ? Is that true ? And you know you *said* you would see me through.”

"Well, I'm going to," says Mr. Blake, cheerfully.

"We are so *pleased* you have come," says Lady Ingram to the latter, in a little quick sort of way. "I suppose in a sense, you are my cousin too, though not so near as Bridget. I hope you will stay with us all the winter—quite as long as she will."

"Oh! thank you—thank you!" says Blake, with a delightful gratitude, and indeed he *is* grateful to this dear woman for her sweetness to him. "But I must get back next week. I"—laughing—"did dare so far as to hope you would take me in and be good to me for a few days, for Bridget's sake——"

"Oh! a few days!"

"Yes, for Bridget's sake," repeats Blake, smiling. "You see, her father can't bear her out of his sight, and when at last she made *him* consent to her going, she—well, she's

always had her own way, you know, and she's a little tyrant *au fond*—and she said she could never undertake the journey without a courier. I'm"—smiling again—"the courier!"

Something in his smile, which is charming beyond words, if a trifle sad, suggests to Lady Ingram an idea.

"And you—and—she. You were glad to come?" questions she, with a sympathetic glance.

"Oh, no!" returns he, calmly. "That is all over—all over and done with—a year ago. It is as well you should know. Naturally, I lost my head a little once; you will understand that when you see more of her!"

"She——?"

"Oh! nonsense!" says Blake, laughing freely; "you mustn't make a romance out of it; I assure you, I'm all there now! But"

had my *mauvaise quart d'heure* I confess." He pauses and looks toward the other three men, who are all now standing round Bridget, and growing quite eloquent as they talk to her. "Soon they will have theirs," says he.

"You mean——?" asks Lady Ingram, in a rather nervous tone.

"Nothing"—lightly—"that can hurt *her*. She can't help it! She can't, I assure you! It isn't her fault. You have heard of the conquering hero, but you have not heard of the conquering heroine! It is my happy task to have to introduce her to you! She is Bridget!"

He smiles quaintly.

"Lord Delaine proposed to her last month," continues he. "He is young, rich, desirable in most ways, and quite a good *fellow*, but she wouldn't have him at any *price because she said she thought his nose*

would be fat when he was forty ! Connaghmore was angry about that. Angry with everybody in the world round him, I mean, *except* Bridget ! Nobody is ever angry with Bridget ! ”

“ Oh, *I* shall be,” says Lady Ingram. “ What a little coquette ! ”

“ No, she isn’t,” says her cousin ; “ she’s a good sort all through. Her sisters adore her—so does everybody. No, you mustn’t run away with that idea ; she’s always sorry—afterward ! She doesn’t know her own power, that’s all. It is in her eyes, I think, or her manner, or her mouth. Pshaw ! ” straightening himself and frowning, “ one doesn’t know where it comes in ! ”

“ Well, I am glad you will give me a week at least, to help me to work out the enigma,” says Lady Ingram, who has taken a great fancy to this handsome young Irishman.

"I'm afraid I sha'n't be able to help you," says Blake.

"You can at least tell me her faults."

Blake laughs.

"Ah! that is her nearest approach to one," says he, "that we can't discover them; no one can. I, who have known her all my life, I am still looking for them! I sha'n't find them; you won't either."

"But you, I believe *you* are a hopeless case, in spite of all you have said," says Lady Ingram, smiling at him gayly, yet looking so evidently sorry for him that he makes a little gesture of denial.

"Wrong, quite wrong," declares he. "I have told you there was a time—it was a bad time; but it is behind me. I have survived! I shall endure now to the end;" he shrugs his shoulders with an amused glance at her. "I hope only she may marry well—*happily*, I mean."

Lady Ingram, still regarding him, grows puzzled. But after another moment or two of keen scrutiny comes to the conclusion that it is all indeed at an end, and that he is now heart-whole.

"I shall do my best for her," says she.

"That is what everyone does."

"What?"

"Their best for her. And she is always grateful—but she doesn't always agree with one's view of what is best."

"Perhaps *that's* a fault!" says Lady Ingram, laughing.

"No, no. You know I *told* you she was immaculate." Seeing Bridget coming toward them, he stops and says quickly, in a low tone: "It must be *happily*, mind. She couldn't live without happiness! I leave her to you!"


CHAPTER V.

“Jealousy is cruel as the grave ; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame.”

CERTAINLY Bridget, as an aspirant to happiness, leaves nothing to be desired ! It occurs indeed to Lady Ingram on the third day that she needn't have aspired at all, because she, as she stands, is Happiness itself.

All through the house her spirit seems to rush—wakening it, enlivening it, and, in a very pretty and utterly delightful sense, thoroughly demoralizing it.

This has to do with the men of the house only, however, and Lady Ingram ! For the *rest* (*it includes three other women*) they



have refused to be fascinated, and have indeed so far forgotten themselves as to be almost rude to the new idol !

Terence Blake, being a mere passer-by, the guest of a night, as it were, is hardly to be considered. He stands neutral ; and as he never by word or sign takes any notice of Bridget—who surely might be considered to be still in his care—his avoidance of her becomes noticeable.

He is charming to her always when compelled to find himself beside her, at the exigencies that sometimes arise at afternoon tea or dinner ; but for the rest he keeps himself thoroughly aloof from her—he scrupulously avoids her indeed, giving her full play to do as she likes with the men around her, who are as flies before her, and she—the web !

It has now, alas ! become almost openly apparent that every man in the house except Blake and his host are at her feet.

“There is one thing,” says Claudia, who is standing in the brilliantly-lighted drawing-room, just after dinner on this third evening, with Gascoigne beside her—“there is one thing about her——”

“*Only* one thing?” questions Gascoigne. His eyes are wandering to the piano, where Bridget is singing a merry little French *chanson*, accompanying herself with the gayest air imaginable.

“Oh, there may be more than one,” says Miss Ruthven, with a frown, noting his abstraction, “but for one I can vouch.”

Gascoigne, with difficulty dragging his eyes from the slight young form upon the piano-stool, that seems the embodiment of all things that mean life and youth and love, looks at her.

“And that?” demands he, a little impatiently. It was not so he used to address *her only three days ago*.

“Her cousin can’t bear her,” says Claudia, with a vindictive and very pleased certainty.

“Can’t he?” says Gascoigne. It is on the tip of his tongue to say: “He must be an ass, then!” but Providence is good to him once more, and brings him to his senses, and a recollection of Claudia’s thousands. “Bad sign,” says he. In his soul he is glad to think that there is one man the less to love this pretty, happy, lovely Irish girl.

“That’s what I think,” says Miss Ruthven. “A girl, whose nearest relations can’t keep up even the semblance of the barest civility toward her, must be—*well!*—one doesn’t like—of course——” hesitating, with quite a remarkably charitable air, that is unfortunately lost upon her companion, whose eyes are riveted on the back of Bridget’s head, and who is consumed with jealousy of Luxford, who is bending over her, and turn-

ing the pages of her song, "to be *nasty* to another girl—but—I can't help thinking Miss O'Neill must be wanting in—in——"

"In what?" sharply.

"Nice feeling! She *is* a little vulgar, don't you think?"

"I don't," says Gascoigne; he smiles quite sweetly as he says it, but he *does* say it. Then once again fear seizes on him. "By the way, that cousin of hers who so abhors her," says he, lightly—"what of him? You know you said you wanted to see a wild Irishman—you remember?"

He straightens himself, turns his back deliberately on the charming figure singing to them, and concentrates his attention on Claudia. A knowledge that he has gone a little too far, has expressed too warm an admiration for the invader—a knowledge suggested by Miss Ruthven's eyes, which are *now a trifle* suspicious—warns him that he

must retrieve his position with the heiress or perish. "You must remember, that was the day on which he came."

"I'm afraid I do not," says she stiffly. "I know only that I detest *all* Irish people."

"What! even this Irish Adonis?" He is doing his biggest best to look jealous, but he feels the effort is inadequate to the occasion. "It seemed to me that for the past few days you have given all your thoughts to him."

There is a shred of truth in this. Miss Ruthven, having learned that Blake is Lord Connaghmore's heir, had played small wiles upon him. But Blake had been impervious to all advances. He had been as nice to her as possible—he had been as nice as possible to every other woman in the house as well, but he had devoted his evenings to playing Bezique with Sir William, and had cared "nothing for anybody," as Mrs. Gaveston said afterward.

“Why should I not,” says Claudia, with a curling lip. “These Irish people, I have been told, are dangerous. They are all rebels, incendiaries—murderers! Of course I have given many thoughts to him. Sir William is my host. His interests are therefore mine. The Irish detest the English, as you know, and who could say when a murderous craze might not break forth in his Irish guests?” She waits for an answer to her folly, suggested by mere spleen, but nothing coming, she goes on: “At all events,” contemptuously, “I hope both Mr. Blake and his cousin will go home without houghing Sir William’s cattle or pouring hot tar over our heads—the usual methods of revenge in Ireland, I understand.”

The absurd venom that swells her words is too much for Gascoigne.

He laughs. This laugh might have had *disastrous* consequences, if he had not at

once caught Claudia's hand, and drawn it through his arm, pressing it warmly as he does so. To a maiden well on the way to the thirties these pressures are golden.

"Come over to Lady Ingram, she has been signalling to me," says he. Which last is a lie, pure, but not simple.

Miss Ruthven suffers herself to be led across the room and up to Lady Ingram, who is standing with Theo near a round table. Theo is talking very fast, apparently quite amicably, but her eyes are blazing.

If Gascoigne had hoped to escape the dreaded subject of Bridget by crossing the room, he is now woefully mistaken. It appears that here, and now, the war against that Irish intruder is raging strongly, if secretly.

Theo, seeing Claudia, makes a little expressive gesture, full of pleasure.

"It is you," says she. "We—Auntie and I—have been talking of Miss O'Neill—of her gowns! She," with a little would-be pleasant smile, "she *does* dress well, doesn't she? I've been asking Auntie where she gets her frocks."

"Yes, I've noticed," says Miss Ruthven. "They are very well! The one on her looks like—like—Braun, I think. Is it Braun, dear Lady Ingram?"

"No. I am sure not," says Lady Ingram.

"Ah! If you are so sure, that tells a secret. You—*you* have given them to her!"

"No," says Lady Ingram.

"No? Yet she said yesterday she had never been in town," says Theo.

"There are more towns than one in the world," says Lady Ingram; "surely during *all your* wandering to and fro over the face

of the earth, you must have heard of Dublin. It is not a little village, I assure you; there are in it many excellent dressmakers, though they cannot date their letters from Bond Street or Regent Street. Lady Zetland has even so far managed as to wear a gown or two of theirs."

"Yes—but," says Theo, who, though so small and fragile, has a stubborn soul, that is now deeply angered by Lady Ingram's touch of sarcasm, "I quite understood that Miss O'Neill was—poor—that is, hardly in a position to go to Lady Zetland's dressmaker."

"My dear Theo! You should study manners," says Lady Ingram, coldly. "Pray do not let your belief in Bridget's poverty lead you into miscalculations with regard to her. Lord Connaghmore, her father, though certainly a poor man for a baron, is still not a beggar. He can, at all events, af-

ford to dress his charming daughter as her great beauty demands that she should be dressed."

Lady Ingram, good Christian as she is, cannot refrain from this slap.

Here Mrs. Gaveston comes up to them, and Gascoigne, seeing a chance of escape, turns away. He had told himself that he would go to the next room, opening out of this, where his uncle and Blake were playing Bezique, but the way to this room leads past the piano.

Bridget has stopped singing, and is talking merrily to Lord Luxford and the Professor, who are both seemingly hanging on her words, as though up to this words have been dull and void sounds to them.

"What an ass the Professor does look," says Gascoigne to himself, noting Frewman's absorbed air. "By Jove, I wouldn't

give myself away like that for a good deal."

He strides past the piano filled with mirth at the remembrance of the Professor's silly look of admiration, but as he goes a sweet voice calls to him :

" Oh ! is that you, Mr. Gascoigne ? Come here—come here at *once*. *You* shall decide. We are having such an argument, and all about poor old Beethoven. And you"—Gascoigne has come back, and is now, indeed, standing as close to her as circumstances will permit—"you," with a pretty, lovely air, and a lifting of her brows, and a parting of her lips over her pearly teeth, and a brilliant light cast upward from her dark-blue eyes—"you—who know *everything*—you will be on my side, won't you ? "

He was on her side—long, *long* before the argument was even laid out before him.

"Tell me about it," says he, with an absorbed air.

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"Your cousin," says Mrs. Gaveston, turning her gaze from the piano to look at Lady Ingram, "how lovely, how altogether desirable she is! I feel I *must* congratulate you on such an acquisition. Until to-night we hardly knew all her charms, but now—her singing! It is perfect, and her accent above praise! I do loathe a girl who sings French songs

" ' Full, fair, and fetisly,
After the School at Stratford-atte-Bow.' "

Miss O'Neil sings delightfully; and how pretty she is! How girlish! Quite refreshing in these days. Not a touch of *guile* about her." She looks once again toward the piano, where the Professor, with an *animation* hitherto unknown to his friends, is

explaining to Bridget that though he had *seemed* to disagree with her in the first moment, still his and her ideas, on this and every other matter in the world, are quite agreed.

“I feel as if I could *love* her,” says Mrs. Gaveston, with enthusiasm.

CHAPTER VI.

“ God makes sech nights all white an’ still,
Fur’z you can look or listen,
Moonshine an’ snow on field an’ hill,
All silence an’ all glisten.”

PERHAPS she could ! Certainly the other two couldn’t ! And this is but the beginning of all bad things ! By the time another three days have gone by, there is almost a revolution in the house. Lady Ingram, who has become devotedly attached to Bridget, is distracted. Yet what can she do ? Can she by sheer force drag away every man under her roof from his unhappy allegiance to this new siren ? Can she destroy the glamour that this tall, slim, lovely Irish witch has cast over them ? No ! The task *is too great !*

One might tackle one lover, and show him the error of his ways, but *three* lovers ! That is too much for her strength.

For now it is a matter past argument that it is not only Lord Luxford (who from the beginning had been quite a prominent feature in the admiration society, that had hung upon Bridget's words) who has fallen a prey to her charms ; the Professor and Gerald Gascoigne, too, have, oblivious of all their pasts, prostrated themselves at her shoes, which are embroidered to match her frocks, are known by their maker as "small twos," and have the highest heels imaginable.

The click-clack of these high-heeled shoes is the sweetest music ever yet known by Luxford, and Frewman, and Gascoigne. Yea ! sweeter than her voice itself, for it always tells them she is coming.

Luxford is perhaps the most lovelorn of

the three ; the worst of the three, if one can count the shades of passion that separates them !

Luxford ! This extraordinary certainty forced upon her, gives Lady Ingram pause. It seems so impossible ! *Can* it be true ?

Of course, she had seen his attentions to that silly Theo ! Lady Ingram has hardly any patience with that small girl, who, as a rule, lets her feelings run away with her head. She had not believed in his fancy for Theo, but in spite of herself she *does* believe in his extreme infatuation for Bridget. There is no mistake about that ! Yes, impossible as it may seem, this hardened man of the world has fallen a victim to the charms of this Irish cousin of hers, who in all probability has never been very far out of a quiet country place before.

Luxford, of all men ! who has boasted of *his* determination never to marry ! Lux-

ford, who has been so sought after by the very best people as a *parti* for their daughters! Beyond doubt he is as good a match as is to be found anywhere in England at this moment. He is tired of "*being stalked*," as he himself expresses it, in his own charming way! As here Lady Ingram recollects his "way," her lip curls! It had been Sir William's wish to have him here, and Lady Ingram, who never disputes her husband's wishes, had been very good to Lord Luxford since his arrival—*considering!*

It had occurred to her to tell Bridget of the three different flirtations—they were hardly serious enough to be called by any other name—that were going on in the house before her arrival. But then, would she be justified in so doing? Would she not be giving away three girls intrusted to her care? *Were these three men who were*

her guests *bona fide* lovers? She did not know. She could not be sure! None of them had actually spoken. Not one. How she wishes now that Luxford *had*!

It would have put an end to so many anxieties now racing through her mind. She is indeed in a dilemma, divided between the advantages to be gained by Bridget from a marriage with this wealthy young earl, and her secret dread of the wealthy young earl's nature. No! Bridget must not be sacrificed!

Lady Ingram's distressed anticipations, her fears, her doubts, are accentuated elsewhere. There had been, in fact, an indignation meeting at Ingram Towers among the women of her party, leaving out Bridget, of course. But nothing came of it! What *could* they do to Bridget? What had she done to them? Definition is a troublesome *thing*. There had been also a terrible scene

between Lady Ingram and Theo about Bridget; but what could there come of that, either? Nothing.

It made Lady Ingram nervous, however, and uncertain and unhappy.

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To-night, in spite of all the undercurrent hostilities, dinner has gone off beautifully. Not a hitch anywhere. And after dinner, even in the drawing-room, where Bridget is left alone with her enemies, no unpleasantness arises either. Lady Ingram begins to breathe again.

In spite of the fact that it is winter, the night is mild and soft, almost luminous. So glorious is it, indeed, that after a while they all, as if compelled to it, move toward the windows and gaze upward to the glowing heavens.

"Look up," says Carlyle, "and behold the

eternal fields of light that lie round the throne of God. Had no star ever appeared in the heavens, to man there would have been no heavens, and he would have laid himself down to his last sleep in a spirit of anguish, as upon a gloomy earth vaulted over by a material arch—solid and impervious ! ”

“ What a night ! ” says Bridget, in a low tone, gazing at the stars that are lying thick and dazzling over all the huge plain of heaven.

“ How funnily those stars twinkle,” says Theo, idly.

“ You don’t have them as bright as that in Ireland, do you, Miss O’Neill ? ” asks Mrs. Gaveston.

“ Oh, yes. And brighter—*brighter* ! ” says Bridget, gently, but with enthusiasm.

“ Ireland must be Arcadia ! ” says Miss *Ruthven*, with a sarcastic smile. “ Every-

thing happy and lovely seems to dwell therein !”

“ Oh, no ! Not everything,” says Luxford, who has stolen upon them unawares. He goes straight to Bridget, and looks down at her. “ At least, not at this moment ! Miss O’Neill is no longer in that happy isle ! ”

He laughs as he says it, but there are one or two who can see beyond the laughter into the real meaning. Bridget, however, is not one of these. She laughs back at him, lifting her beautiful head and glancing at him through half-shut lids.

“ What a lovely compliment,” cries she, gayly. “ I take it. I accept it. It is a little gift from you to me.”

“ Too small a one ! ” says Luxford. He goes nearer to her.

There is a little sharp but quiet move-

ment among the others lower down on the balcony.

"Theo, *don't!*" Mrs. Gaveston lays a forcible hand on the girl's arm.

"Oh! What a wretch! What a *devil!*" gasps Theo. The moonlight is falling on her young childish face, a face transformed! The sweet infantile eyes are now cat-like in their ferocity. Her lips are livid. The word "Devil" seems to fall with a click from between them. Mrs. Gaveston, still restraining her, wonders if they had ever understood this girl before. Theo, who had seemed so gentle, so merry, so—kittenish. Yes, kittenish was the word.

Evidently it was the right word. Mrs. Gaveston, gazing at her, tells herself she is fast developing into a cat.

"What is this? Are you ill, Theo?" asks Lady Ingram, coming suddenly up to

them. The girl's appearance indeed gives her room for thought.

Miss Ruthven laughs, but Mrs. Gaveston, drawing Lady Ingram aside, gives an explanation.

"It is nothing. She is very foolish. She"—in a low tone—"is angry about—you can see"—with a little nod to where Bridget and Lord Luxford are evidently enjoying themselves tremendously—"over there." Indeed, a fresh burst of laughter comes to them as she speaks. "About his attentions to your cousin!"

"Such folly," says Miss Gascoigne, chiming in with her aggravating air of contempt for all things. "To betray oneself like that. It amounts to idiocy!" She gives a slighting glance at Theo, who is sitting, waiting, watching—always watching the couple at the farther end of the terrace, with a cruel look in her young face, that

makes it almost old. "To give herself away *so*——"

"You should be the last to condemn her. You—her professed friend!" says Lady Ingram, coldly. Then she turns and calls, backward as it were, to those in the heated drawing-room behind her—to the men who have just come in from the dining-room:

"Have you seen the stars, William? They are very grand to-night."

Her husband answers her call, and comes to the open window.

"Have *you* ever heard of the influenza?" says he. "Come in out of this; come in, Eleanor, and don't be a goose!"

He takes forcible possession of her. Though laughing, she remembers what has to be done—the breaking up of that *tête-à-tête* at the end of the balcony for one thing—and she calls out to Bridget:

"*Bridget!*"

"Yes," says Bridget, turning her charming head.

"If you *must* study the stars, come up to the old Tower. William says influenza will lay you low if you stay out there any longer. Come—let us all go up to the Tower."

"Yes. Let us go. How delightful!" cries Bridget, running toward them. "Are you coming too, Terence?" to her cousin, who is standing close to Sir William. "It is the most beautiful old tower, and with *such* a view from it!"

"No, I'm not coming," says Blake, looking at her steadily, but with a perfect smile.

"No?" Bridget, with one supercilious glance, puts him behind her.

"I am going, Miss O'Neill," says Gascoigne, eagerly, coming up to her, and making a little gesture as if to go to the door

forthwith—the door that leads to the hall, and from thence to the Tower.

“Are you? Come then,” says Bridget, turning abruptly away from Blake, and accompanying Gascoigne across the room.

CHAPTER VII.

“ I saw the brimmed bowl in her grasp
Thrilling with godhood ; like a lover
I sprang the proffered life to clasp—
The beaker fell : the luck was over.”

It is half an hour later. They have all grown a little tired of the stars now, and are sitting about in the Tower room in groups of twos and threes. Through the windows the brilliant, frosty light of the moon is streaming ; it strikes most forcibly upon Bridget, who, with Gascoigne, is standing in a little recess—not alone, but with Claudia Ruthven and Lord Luxford close to her. The cold beams strike, too, upon a little quaint, old gold ornament lying in Luxford's palm.

"Sixteen hundred, certainly," says Gascoigne, examining it. "A trifle, but valuable, because of its age. What is it? A coin?"

"A locket," says Luxford; "but worn so thin that it might well pass as a coin in this light."

"How interesting!" says Bridget. "Fancy all it must have seen—have heard—in these long years! Oh! I *should* like to have an old, old ornament like that. It might"—laughing—"whisper to one its secrets in one's dreams."

"Take it," says Luxford, handing it to her.

"No—no, indeed!" says Bridget, laughing, and shaking her head.

"Why not?" But Bridget will not answer that question.

"What is its shape?" asks Claudia, leaning forward. "A heart?" •

"A heart? Yes. It is Lord Luxford's heart!" says Bridget, with an amused air.

"And I have offered it to you," says Luxford, adopting her own air, but with too much meaning in his tone to make the copy an exact one.

"And I have declined it—remember that!" says Bridget, gayly.

"Don't compel me to such a hateful memory," says Luxford. "You really must not refuse it. If you do, I'll say you are afraid of it—of its haunting you, I mean—giving you bad dreams."

"Oh! it is too good a heart for that, I feel sure," says Bridget, giving him a little glance from under her long lashes. This glance would have given an Irishman warning (there is so much, far too much, gayety in it)—it unfortunately gives the Englishman hope.

"If it is so good—take it."

“If I took it,” says Bridget, the touch of coquetry that overrules her now in full force, “I should keep it—forever. I warn you of that.”

“Take it,” persists Luxford, “forever!” He still tries to keep up the little farce, but he is rather failing miserably in *his* part. He has forgotten even to smile, his eyes are riveted on hers.

“You hear, Terence?” says Bridget, throwing back her lovely head to where her cousin is standing, a little apart—a little in the shadow, but listening. He had followed them up-stairs after all. She is so sure that he is listening, that she makes no effort to explain to him the situation. “Lord Luxford is giving me his heart—this charming trinket. Shall I accept it?”

“Am I my cousin’s keeper?” says Terence Blake, lightly. “It is very kind of Lord Luxford. *It*”—coming up to her and peering

at the coin over her shoulder—"seems to be a very pretty bit of tinsel."

"It is not tinsel—it is gold all through," says Luxford, with a sharp glance at him.

"Ah! of course." Blake leans even closer as if to examine it more minutely in the uncertain light. "And old, and so thoroughly worn out that it *must* be valuable. Accept it, my dear Bridget—accept it—one doesn't come by such coins every day."

"Is that your advice?" says Bridget. "Come now," smiling up at him, "you *are* my keeper for the present, in spite of all you say. Is that your advice?"

"Ah! Advice to a woman!" says Blake, shrugging his shoulders and walking away.

"You abandon me, then—you shirk your responsibilities," cries Bridget, making a little tragic gesture, full of mockery, with her beautiful bare arms. The moonlight is streaming in upon her, lighting up the pale

pink gleamings of her lovely gown, and showing all the loveliness of her white neck and bosom.

“ Her beauty would surprise
Gazers on autumn eves
Who watched the broad moon rise
Upon the scattered sheaves.”

“ I have none,” says Blake, looking back at her smiling. There is something deliberate in his tone. “ You are free, free—you like to be free, you know.” He nods to her as if to remind her of something past, and, as if unmoved by her beauty, the exquisitely tragic pose of her arms, runs down the tower steps out of sight.

“ Ah ! you see how people treat me,” says Bridget, plaintively, turning to the others. Her plaining is the prettiest thing possible. “ After all, Lord Luxford, I have *made up* my mind ; I *won't* accept that

trinket of yours. It is unlucky—you can see for yourself! It has lost me a friend already, and yet”—with a little pout—“what a pity! I always wanted an amulet of one sort or another.”

“If only of one sort or another, I have one that may suit you,” says Gascoigne. “It is so modern that I defy it to bring ill luck to anyone. And as it happens, it is a heart too! It is only a shilling that I once in an idle moment carved into that shape. Take it, and my blessing with it, Miss O’Neill.”

“*You* carved it!” says Miss Ruthven, quickly. She steps nearer, almost between Gascoigne and Bridget, and endeavors to meet his gaze—but his thoughts are all for Bridget. “You, yourself? How *interesting*! I have seen coins made into rings, but never into hearts before. How clever! But it must be rather a treasure, eh?”

Miss O'Neill will not deprive you of it, I know."

There is a little silence—then.

"Miss O'Neill *will*," says Bridget, with a gay little laugh. "What! refuse *two* hearts in one evening? No, no. That would be too cruel! Lord Luxford's heart was too precious. I had to refuse that, but I shall take yours, Mr. Gascoigne, and treasure it all my days as a specific against every evil under the sun."

"You—you will take it?" says Gascoigne; all his ordinary light, satirical manner has deserted him, he is stammering like a school-boy. "But not this," says he, drawing back the shilling. "Let me give you—it—in—in something better. I can get it made—I——"

"No, no, no; I will have your own heart or nothing," says Bridget, who ought to *have been* ashamed of herself.

But Bridget is never ashamed. She picks up the tail of her gown, and moves toward the staircase.

“ You see! you see ! ” cries she, defiantly—audaciously—but oh ! so prettily—as she runs lightly past Lord Luxford. She holds up before his nose the little silver shilling heart in her hand, and then goes dancing down the stairs.

.

Somebody else is dancing, too—but with a very different emotion. Miss Ruthven is dancing with rage ! This is a mere figure of speech, of course, as women do not, as a rule, perform can-cans either in public or private, even when brought to the pitch that makes them desire the death of the enemy by slow torture.

Miss Ruthven dances inwardly ; outwardly she is unmoved ; she conducts herself, indeed, with the most perfect precision during

the short half hour that intervenes from the coming down those turret stairs to the taking up of the candlesticks preparatory to going to bed.

Bridget, I regret to say, goes to her room with a clear conscience. Bridget's conscience is always clear. She has never yet awakened to the fear that perhaps her many coquetries will some time bring her a day of heavy reckoning.

Perhaps an inkling of it is coming to her now! There is a loud knock at her bedroom door.

She pauses in the act of brushing her long, silky hair, and turns abruptly.

"Come in!" cries she, and as she says it the door is flung wide, and Nemesis in the form of Claudia Ruthven stalks into the room.

Miss Ruthven is looking very handsome, *if a trifle passée*. She is dressed still in her

evening gown, but has taken off any ornaments she had worn. There is a look of haste—of excitement—about her. She gives Bridget an instantaneous impression that she had five minutes before begun to undress herself, and had then fastened her gown again, with the intention of at once doing something. Her hair is a little loosened; her eyes are brilliant—a little malignant. Never has Bridget seen her so dignified, though dignity is her special *rôle*. At this moment she is bristling with it.

“You are ill; you want something,” cries Bridget, springing to her feet, and taking it for granted that the direst necessity only could have driven her to her room at this hour.

“You are right!” says Miss Ruthven, in a tone that precludes the idea of illness at all events. “I want—an explanation!”

"A what?" says the astonished Bridget, staring at her.

"You heard me"—insolently—"I wish to know what you mean by your conduct—your"—losing her dignity a little bit—" *de-testable* conduct of this evening."

"You must be frightfully ill," says Bridget. "You must have eaten something that has disagreed with you. Shall I go back to your room with you, or shall I call your maid?"

"You will call no one!" says Miss Ruthven, with decision. "You shall sit there until I hear from you—what I wish to hear."

Bridget looks at her for a moment as if hardly believing her ears, and then, all at once, in spite of a struggle with herself, she throws back her head, and bursts into uncontrollable laughter. She, *Bridget*, the sovereign ruler of her own

empire, to be thus ordered about! It is too funny! If Terence could only see this little comedy!

"I am to sit *here*, then. *Is* it here? You are sure it isn't *there*? It is gracious of you to permit me to sit at all in so august a presence. And now," flinging herself with exquisite *abandon* into a deep chair, and crossing her lovely, naked arms behind her flowing hair, that covers her as with a garment, "let me know what it is you wish to hear."

"You know it already," says Miss Ruthven, who is now very pale. "You *must* know how abominably you behaved up in that tower this evening. You"—she pauses, and then, suddenly turning upon Bridget with a gesture that is almost violent—"What do you mean by your manner to Gerald Gascoigne?"

"I might as well ask you," says Bridget,

lazily, "what you mean by your manner toward me."

"You *shall* answer me!" says Miss Ruthven, vehemently. "Why did you take that trinket from him? If you think he cares for you—*you*——"

"I seldom think," says Bridget. She suppresses a yawn very carefully—too carefully.

"Then you should!"

"Why?" smiling. "Have you been thinking? It"—slowly, and with an expressive glance at her—"is not becoming."

"You can be as impertinent as you like—but I warn you——"

"Oh! don't!" laughing. "And I really wouldn't keep on thinking if I were you. I have always heard that thought brings bülkles. Don't, *don't* do it!"

Bridg answer me!" says Miss Ruthven, in a

tone choking with rage. "That trinket—that heart of Gerald Gascoigne's—why did you take it?"

Bridget lets her lovely head fall slightly to one side, she even lifts a white shoulder to meet it. All at once she has turned herself into a naughty child, waiting for its scolding. The pose is perfect.

"To—to *play with it!*" says she in a low, little whisper, fraught with mischief and childish defiance!

"Oh!" cries Claudia Ruthven.

It is a mere monosyllable, but there is such rage, such venom in it, that it brings Bridget into an every-day position once more.

"I know what you mean! You would play with it and break it. I shall tell him! I shall tell him!"

"He will love you for that!" says Bridget, with open contempt.

"He shall not love you, at all events!" says Miss Ruthven, vindictively. "I shall see to that!"

"Take care!" says Bridget, with a curious little smile. "Do not put me on my mettle!"

"How *dare* you speak to me like that—how dare you!" cries the other violently.

Bridget rises slowly from her chair.

"I dare all things!" says she, quite calmly, though now her eyes are very bright, "even you! I'm sorry for one or two things I said to you just now. They were unjustifiable because they were rude. But now, you must go away. I wish to go to bed."

"I shall not go," says Claudia, "until I have heard what you intend doing in——"

"I think you will go," says Bridget. She walks straight up to her and lays her *small but firm* little hand upon Claudia's

arm. Almost before Claudia has time to think, she finds herself in the corridor outside, and listens to the calm turning of the key in Bridget's door.

CHAPTER VIII.

“Sorely they have teased me,
And vexed me early and late,
Some with too much loving,
Others with downright hate.

• • • • •

“But she who most has grieved me,
Who saddened and changed my fate,
Alas! she never loved me,
She did not even hate.”

“You ~~seem~~ to have got into a nice mess already!” says Blake, looking at her.

“Yes. It *is* a mess, I suppose! None of these dreadful women will speak to me!”

“I’m not surprised, I’m sure.” He turns impatiently away from her, and strolls *toward the window*. It is his last day here,

and in two more hours he will have left the house, and be well on his way back to Ireland.

“ Oh, I know all you are going to say,” says Bridget, tilting her chin and shrugging her shoulders. “ And that is *something*, because you can always say so much.”

As he does not turn at this gibe, she gives him a little glance from behind her eye, as they say, and, finding his back alone is the recipient of this telling dart, she makes a fresh departure. She steps noiselessly across the room, and when she gets to him, keeping still well behind, she leans against him, and rubs her cheek penitently, fondly against his arm.

“ Terry ! ” says she.

No answer.

“ *Dear* Terry ! ”

Still a stern silence. Evidently Mr. Blake is up to her little ways.

"Terry, *darling!*" says Bridget, slipping her arm within his, and swerving round so as to bring her charming face within an inch or so of his.

Mr. Blake must be the sternest-hearted mortal alive. He deliberately shakes her arm out of his and confronts her.

"Look here, what do you want me to say?" asks he.

"That I'm not in the wrong," whispers Bridget, beseechingly. She has elevated her brows now, and has brought her lips to a pretty pout.

"I shall certainly not say that," says Blake, with decision. He goes back to the fire and stands firm upon the hearth-rug with his hands clasped behind him.

"Well, you *are* a flint!" says Miss O'Neill, with disgust. "And," with a little *moue*, "for the matter of that, I don't care what you *say!*"

“Just so,” returns her cousin, unmoved.

“But what have I done, then?” cries she, throwing out her pretty hands. “Have I murdered anybody? or insulted anybody? or stolen anybody’s goods?”

“Oh! as for that,” says her cousin, “you are the biggest thief I know.”

“Terence!”—she sinks into a chair near a little table. “That’s slanderous!” says she.

“That’s actionable!”

“Well—aren’t you?”

“A thief? What have I stolen, then?”

“The hearts of all the men in the house!”

“I like that!” says she, with fine scorn.

“It is true for all that.”

“Is it? *You* are one of the men in the house.”

Blake regards her coldly.

“So is Sir William,” says he.

“You mean——”



"That we are both out of it altogether, not to be counted. He is your host, I am your cousin."

Something in his air checks her. He has not moved and he is looking at her with an unflinching sternness. Her cousin, nothing more. She frowns a little.

"A cousin indeed!" petulantly. "One in a thousand. A most *sweet* cousin!" Here she pauses, wrath overcoming her. "I only wish you could see *how* sweet you look, with that nasty, horrid, cold stare in your eye," cries she, vindictively.

"Never mind my eye," says Blake. "Go on."

Under this persistent brutality she breaks down.

"Of course I can see you would rather support *any* side than mine. But I *defy* you"—angrily—"to say that those women *have just* cause for boycotting me."

"Fancy boycotting in England!" says Blake. He laughs a little, then grows stern again. "Why should they shower their friendship on you?" says he. "You have stolen away their lovers, and now you expect them to be good to you. Look at that scene last night. I wonder you weren't ashamed of yourself. That ass, Gascoigne, and his silver heart—you knew Miss Ruthven and he had—well—there was certainly *talk* of a marriage between them, and yet you deliberately went in for him, and took that trinket as a gift, and——"

"But I gave it back this morning! I didn't want it a bit."

"I am afraid there is something you can't give back to him."

"Nonsense!" flushing hotly. "You must be an idiot to talk like that. Do you think I am Venus re-born?"

"It doesn't matter what I think. The

question is, why did you take that trinket last night?"

"Well, if you will have it, to annoy Lord Luxford," says she, playing with a little ivory ornament on the table before her.

There is a pause. Then, "Why do you want to annoy Lord Luxford?" asks her cousin, slowly.

Another pause.

"Oh, I don't know," impatiently.

"Take care, Bridget," says her cousin. "Take care!"

"Of whom?" asks Bridget. She has given up her little sulky pose and is now all light, and gayety, and mischief again. "Of Lord Luxford?"

"If you have made up your mind to it," says Blake, evenly. "Though I think you are the person who should be cared *for*. Still, Luxford has money and position, and—what else?"

"Oh, *I* don't know. I'm listening. I'm going to hear," says Bridget, lightly.

"There is nothing to hear, I'm afraid. I would say just one word to you; I would ask you to remember that money and position are not all things, and that there are two sides to every question, a right and a wrong."

"Oh, and a comic side, you must not forget that," says Bridget. "It's the most important side of all, and in this instance you supply it! I never saw *anything* so comic as the magisterial air you have now put on. Don't you," she looks at him with a little defiant, laughing, lovely glance, "*don't* you wish you were a real magistrate and could send me at once to prison for contempt of—Your Royal Highness?"

"I don't wish anything," says Blake, laughing in spite of himself, "except that you had a little common sense."

"Ah! How you would spoil me!"

"You have been spoiled your whole life through," says Blake. He looks at her, and she, catching the look, smiles back at him maliciously, beautifully, provokingly. "Bridget," says he, suddenly, "do you ever *think?*"

"She leans her arms upon the small table, and bending her body over them, looks up at him out of humorous, mocking eyes.

"Of you?" asks she. "Never, never, never!"

"Pshaw!" says Blake. "That is too trivial even for you. I know I am beneath notice." The cruelty of her has eaten into him. But she had not forgiven that "*cousin only.*" "All that is over and done with," says he, icily. "You never did think of me, you never will. That is all ended. And I give you to understand, my good child, once *for all*, that though I did have my *mauvais*

quart d'heure, my present *quart d'heures* are innocent of that barren thing they call regret."

Bridget, still with her chin reclining on her arms, looks at him.

"Almost you tempt me!" says she. A quick fire has sprung into her eyes.

"To what?"

"Shall I tell you?" She has not removed her eyes from his.

"Ah, I guess!" says Blake, laughing. "Ah, *don't*. Don't, I beseech you!" He puts on an expression of overwhelming fear. "You know how I suffered once! I give in! Forget for the future that I am even alive! *Leave* me my new-found peace!"

Bridget looks at him curiously. Is it true—all true? Has this—her most abject slave escaped her?

"So you have found peace?" says she.

smiling at him delightfully. "A thing so few of us ever find, though we search for it all our lives. Come! confess that is one good turn I did you?"

"Oh! I will be more generous than that. One out of many!"

"At all events," says she, smiling still, "I *was* good to you, whether you will acknowledge it or not. I was very good to you. I—let you go."

"I deny that," says he in a pleasantly argumentative sort of way. "I took myself away."

"Did you? Are you sure of that?"

"Quite sure."

"You persist?"

"Certainly I do."

"That is tempting me again," says she, at which they both laugh.

"I must go," says Blake, presently. "I *have only* a few moments to get my things

together. Good-by, Bridget!" He holds out his hand. "Remember, that if you get into more scrapes, into deeper waters—and if you want me—I shall be—like the usual bore—always there!"

"I don't want people who don't want me," says Bridget.

Her cousin smiles.

"I really believe you would flirt with me again if you could—even now," says he.

"You believe wrong, then," says Bridget. She pulls her hand out of his. "There, go, you will be late."

"You needn't be afraid," says he, laughing again. "I'm always in time."

He nods to her and goes toward the door. Bridget runs after him.

"You won't forget my messages to the girls?" says she.

"No," looking back—not coming back.

"And," breathlessly, "to Dad?"

"No—of course not. I have written them all down."

"Well—good-by!"

"Good-by, Bridget."

"Good-by. Terence?"

"Yes?" with an almost fierce impatience now. He is standing at the door, and with the handle in his hand looks back at her.

"I think you *might* call me Biddy," says she. "You used to call me that. You remember? And Bridget—I *hate* Bridget."

"Who could hate Bridget?" says he, as lightly as ever, though his breath is now coming a little quicker. "Well—God keep you, Biddy."

He takes her hand, presses his lips to it carelessly, as it seems, and leaving the room, closes the door calmly behind him.

In the hall, however, he pauses, as if with

a desire to pull himself together. His face is as white as death !

.
They have all come down to the hall-door to see him off. Bridget—attended by Lord Luxford and Gascoigne, with the Professor behind—is the last to bid him farewell. It is not a real farewell ; *that*, unsatisfactory as it was, had taken place an hour ago.

“ You will give my love to everyone, Terence, won't you ? ” She has given him both her hands.

“ To everyone.”

“ You won't forget anyone ? Not even ” —laughing—“ yourself ? ”

“ Not even myself. There ! Take care of *yourself* ! ” He presses her hands, hesitates a moment, and then leans toward her. “ Remember ! If you want me ! Remember.”

“ Remember *what* ? ” He has broken

from her; but she runs after him. He waves her back.

"Oh! he is worse than Charles the First!" says she, stamping her little foot, as the dog-cart rolls away.

Lord Luxford is at her elbow.

"An incubus removed, eh?" says he.

"No—a cousin," says she.

"Same thing, eh? When the cat's away the mice may play!"

"Don't be stupid!" says she, petulantly.

She turns from him and goes down the hall. At the first fireplace she encounters Gascoigne.

"I suppose I may congratulate you on the removal of your mentor!" exclaims he, laughing. "Good fellow, but took a good deal upon himself, didn't he?"

"Did he?" says she. She goes still farther on to the foot of the stairs, where *she* encounters the Professor, who stares at

her with beaming sympathy from behind his glasses.

“So your guardian is gone? Guardians are always a bore,” says he. “And you will be happier now. It is a few miles from this to Ireland, isn’t it?”

“You ought to look up your geography,” says Bridget, tartly. “A ‘few miles’ sounds so vague, so absurd, and from one who considers himself so learned, too!”

She passes the astounded Professor, and running up the stairs, enters her own room, closing the door behind her with a very decided little bang!

CHAPTER IX.

“ Beauty of promise
Promise of beauty,
Safe in the silence
Sleep thou, till cometh
Light to thy lids.”

“ COME in here ! ” says Luxford. The waltz is at an end, and he and Bridget have stopped close to the conservatory door. It is well past midnight, and the little dance—half impromptu—given by Lady Ingram to amuse her guests and the nearest county families—is drawing to a close. Bridget, who dances like an angel, has been enjoying herself with all her heart—and so has Luxford. She has given him every second waltz throughout the entire evening ! A *fact noticed by many.*

Bridget, as a finished coquette of the light-hearted, thoughtless type, is hardly to be surpassed. So much *must* be conceded. But beyond all doubt, Lord Luxford would have had not so much as one of those waltzes had he not been as he is, one of the most perfect dancers in Christendom. As for him, he has been the girl's shadow for the past week—the week that has gone by since Terence Blake's departure. He has followed Bridget about as though he were a slave, paid to attend upon her lightest wish, and as a slave Bridget treats him !

She doubles her caprices, for his benefit as it were. She spares him no shrug, no whim. She drags him at her chariot wheels without thought of mercy. And this conduct of hers piques and annoys, and finally lays him prostrate at her pretty feet.

To night the end has come ! Bridget, running down a little late to the dancing-

room, clad in the palest of all pale pink frocks, a little cloud as it were, that seems to hold her lovely figure in a tender embrace, rushes almost into the arms of Luxford.

"Late, late—*so* late!" quotes she, her beautiful face full of a pretty excitement. "Where is Mr. Gascoigne?"

"Never mind Gascoigne. The first is just over. And this is ours."

"Is it? And a waltz? I hope you waltz well. Oh! Mr. Gascoigne," seeing that young man, glass in reproachful eye, coming up to her, "I *am* sorry, but my hair *wouldn't* get done, and——"

"You can say the rest of it to-morrow," says Luxford, a little roughly. He encircles her with his arm, and they join the dancers within.

That first dance had arranged her evening. Yes, he *could* dance. Bridget gave

him as many waltzes as she could manage, which came to a good deal—and now !

Now she is sitting in the conservatory, listening to the dripping of the fountain over there, and trying not to realize the fact that Luxford is proposing to her, and is waiting for her answer.

“ You are listening ? ” says Lord Luxford, at last, for indeed Bridget’s face leaves the matter open to doubt.

“ Yes—yes,” says Bridget.

“ You understand that I hope you will marry me. That I—love you. That I—would honor you above all women upon earth.”

Bridget looks at him.

That word “ honor.” In its own way, it is a good one, but as Luxford uses it it savors of condescension. That he desires to marry her, that he loves her—all that is usual and as it should be. But to be told

that she—*she*, an O'Neill, is to feel herself honored by a marriage with one of the Luxfords, who are, comparatively speaking, of a mushroom growth when compared with the O'Neills. Well—this annoys Bridget.

"Naturally you *would* honor me," says she, coldly. "A man, if he is a man, always honors his wife."

She has decided upon misunderstanding his meaning, and indeed she has decided upon other things, too, in the short time in which decision has been allowed her. Dad, darling old Dad, who has always prophesied such great things for her, he would be delighted if he knew she was going to be made a real live countess. He might even get over that last terrible disappointment.

"But—you must give me time," says she.

"What do we want with time?" says Luxford, ardently, if foolishly.

"*I* want it," says Bridget, smiling rather imperiously. "It is nothing to you, of course ; it is something to me."

"At least tell me there is hope for me," says he, lightly. He looks upon her demand for time as a mere touch of coquetry—a setting of her charms at a higher value. It is a mere formula in his eyes.

"Hope? Why not?" says Bridget, just as lightly, and with a much truer understanding of *his* mind. "Why should you not hope, until I tell you to despair? And after all"—with a gently thoughtful air—"why should you despair? There is no reason—really—why an O'Neill should not marry a Luxford. I daresay papa would make no objection."

Luxford starts. His brow flushes.

This girl! This daughter of an impecunious Irish baron—that she should hesitate to accept him—*he*, who would be welcomed

with opened arms by half the dowagers of England on behalf of their daughters !

Yet, how beautiful she is ! What breeding shows itself in the small, shapely, scornful head, as she stands there defying him ! What a wife she would be to sit at the head of any man's table—ay ! at a prince's table !

At this moment, when her scorn of him is at its highest, his admiration of her is at its highest, too. Perhaps Bridget recognizes this strange fact. The late pretty touch of hauteur gives way to a sense of amusement. She leans toward him.

“*Ah !* You didn't like that !” says she, with lovely audacity, her red lips parting over her white teeth. “But you must remember that the O'Neills were men when the Luxfords were babies !”

Luxford makes a gesture as if to put all *that aside*.

"Give me my answer!" says he, somewhat imperiously.

"Not now! Not here! And after all——"

"What?"

"Perhaps you won't like the answer when you do get it!"

"That is a nasty speech, but I shall not take it to heart. When shall I get my answer?"

"To-morrow—at breakfast."

"What a time and place!"

"I thought, perhaps," with a mischievous glance at him, "that you would like it as early as possible. You see"—lowering her eyes—"how I study your wishes. I have studied them wrongly, evidently. To-morrow—at dinner, then!"

"No, no," impatiently. "Let it be breakfast. As soon as possible. But how?"

"A pencilled line," sighs Bridget, sweetly,
"shall convey to you—your fate!"

"You will write it, then?"

There is a little frown on Luxford's brow. A girl who is about to be so far honored as to be made the wife of one of the richest earls in England has no right to treat the matter with frivolity.

"Yes," says Bridget, with a little nod. She gets up.

"Ah! that is consent," says Luxford, eagerly. "You have said 'yes.' Remember that was 'yes.'"

"No, no," laughing. She moves toward Gascoigne, who has just come into the conservatory, and who is her partner for the dance now beginning. As she lays her hand on Gascoigne's arm she looks back at Luxford, with a provoking smile. "Remember *that* was 'No,' " says she.

.

She had treated Luxford's proposal very lightly, very indifferently, because it so suited her ; but now, even while dancing with Gascoigne and her other partners, and all through the impromptu *cotillon* that winds up the dance, and of which she is the very life and soul, she dwells somewhat on this last of her proposals. Shall it be yes? Shall it be no?

Dad would like it. It would please him. And he had been very good over that Delaine affair. He had said very little to her about it, but he *had* been disappointed—bitterly. Now, this would make it all up to him. An earl is better than a baron any day, and, even if the earl be objectionable in many ways, still he is always an earl, and—— Yes, Dad *would* be delighted!

And Terence! What will he say, what will he think? Pshaw! why worry about Terence! He had almost as good as told

her to accept Lord Luxford before he left ! He certainly had given her plainly to understand that he had put all that old folly of his behind him. Yes, he had forgotten everything !

“ He will probably marry very well himself. He is already well spoken of in influential circles ; to be private secretary to such a man as Dinmouth means sure promotion, and besides, he will be—be——” Her thoughts break themselves—it is *horrible* to think that there will ever be another Lord O’Neill ; why can’t Dad, darling Dad, live forever ? Perhaps the knowledge that Terence must succeed Dad is why she hates him so much !

The very thought that Dad *must* die makes him so much dearer to her, that before the *cotillon* is at an end she has decided upon accepting Luxford, if only to please her father !

She is restless, however, and even after all is quiet, and the men have gone to the smoking-room, and the women are supposed to be having their hair brushed, she wanders down-stairs to the library, more with a desire to walk off her waking mood than from any longing for literature.

The library leads into a huge gallery beyond, and from that one can get to the drawing-rooms ; it will be quite a little walk to go through them all.

She has hardly entered the library, however, when a sound, a very sad sound, the sound of weeping, brings her to a dead stop.

The library is a huge room, and gaunt ; the lights have been lowered. A sense of uncanniness catches hold of Bridget, who is Irish born. *What* is it? *Where* is it? The thought of a speedy withdrawal suggests itself to her favorably, but then that

crying—surely it is some soul in sad distress. She peers into the gloom.

And there, at the very end of the room, with her head lying in mournful abandon against an arm-chair, lies Theodosia Gascoigne!

CHAPTER X.

“ Then better one spar of memory,
One broken plank of the past,
That our human heart may cling to,
Though hopeless of shore at last ! ”

BRIDGET, cut to the heart by that low, strange crying, goes swiftly up to her. She lays her hand upon her arm.

“ What is it ? ” asks she, anxiously.
“ Don’t cry like that, *don’t* ! Can’t someone help you ? Can’t *I* help you ? ”

Theo lifts her head, and with a sudden movement that drives Bridget several feet away from her, springs to her feet.

“ You ! *you* to help me ! Go ! ” says Theo. She points violently toward the

door. "What brings you here? Can I not be safe from you—even here?"

"I came," says Bridget, gently, "because I could not sleep, and now I am glad I came, because you are ill, I think, and alone, and——"

"How *dare* you talk to me like that, you hypocrite!" says Theo, facing her, with her white face and swollen lids.

"Hypocrite!" repeats Bridget, as if not understanding. Her tone now is cold and unsympathetic. That movement of Theo's, that in less refined circles would have been called a blow, has sent Bridget's blood to her heart in a hot flame. Being Irish born she would certainly not be the last to step forward when battle is scented, even from afar—and now—— "You must be mad," she says, slowly—contemptuously.

"Mad, indeed, when I believed in *him*," says Theo, whose passion has now carried

her altogether away. Bridget casts a swift look at her. To so betray herself! To Bridget it seems nothing less than monstrous, this betrayal openly, deliberately, of one's most sacred feelings.

"*Don't!*" says she, involuntarily lifting one of her slender hands. She draws in her breath sharply—she knows she would have died before she would have so given herself away to her rival.

"Don't *what?*" says Theo, clenching her teeth. "Don't think myself mad to have cast a thought on him? *He*, who has preferred you—*you*—to me! you—a wretched"—she turns her young eyes, now viperish in their wrath, on Bridget—"mercenary Irish *pauper!*"

She pauses. But Bridget, who in all her young life has never heard an insulting word, who in the adoring home where she has reigned from her babyhood as a little

queen, has been shielded and sheltered from every lightest annoyance, is stricken dumb by the very horror of this hateful speech. She stands silent, gazing at Theodosia. It is not so much that her courage has failed her—her courage is always high and true—as that she feels stunned, shocked by the other's outburst.

What kind of girl is this? And what is it all about? What has she done to her? She had heard a little of a flirtation between Theo and Lord Luxford, but she had seen nothing of it, Luxford, indeed, having transferred his attentions to herself from the moment of her arrival—and so she had not believed in it as being serious! Terence had suggested that all the women were jealous of her, but Terence always talked like that. Terence was an alarmist!

But *now!*

At this point Miss Gascoigne, finding

herself unanswered, lets her grief have full sway once more; her contemptible, vulgar little burst of rage dies out, and she flings herself into a chair, and gives herself up a prey to the most dismal sobbing. Bridget, who seems to have grown a little, stands looking down upon her, ineffable scorn on her calm face.

“You!” sobs the little fool in the chair, “you *might* have let him alone.”

“I have not yet heard to whom you are alluding,” says Bridget, icily.

“What! you would pretend still! As if you didn’t *know*,” cries Theodosia; her sobbing ceases, and her rage grows stronger—she starts to her feet like a little fury. “As if all the world hasn’t seen how you have deliberately laid yourself out to attract him—to win him! Will you still deny that you have not used all your arts to draw him on and on, until

to-night he ——” she breaks off as if choking.

“Still, you leave me in the dark,” says Bridget, determined not to help her, and regarding her with a contempt that is almost cruel. But nobody likes to be called bad names.

“I do not!” says Theodosia, vehemently. “But, if you will have it, then—I am speaking of Lord Luxford!”

“He should be greatly honored!” returns Bridget, with a slow smile.

“You can sneer as you like; you think you can afford to sneer at me now! You think you have him at your feet—and of course he is a prize to *you*—a girl without——”

“Oh! you ought to stop, you *ought* to think,” interrupts Bridget, quickly. “Consider how dreadful it will be to you in the *morning* to remember.”

"To remember what? What I have said to *you*? Ah! you are wrong there! I wish I had a thousand tongues that I might tell you how I hate you! Look"—venomously—"you think you are triumphing now! that you will bring him to your feet—but so have thought many others! I tell you, he will never ask you to marry him—*never*! And it is I—I"—maliciously—"who shall laugh over your humiliation later on."

"I don't think so," says Bridget, very quietly, a little disdainfully. Something in the tone, though unmeant, tells all the truth to the jealous girl listening.

The last vestige of color dies from her face, she falls back a step or two, and leans heavily against the arm of the chair near her.

"It is a lie—a lie!" says she, hoarsely. Bridget, looking at her, thinks she is going

to faint; she makes a movement toward her, but Theo waves her back.

"Has he—has he?" gasps she.

"Has he what? I wish you would not be so foolish," says Bridget, impatiently, who is now a little frightened, the other looks so ghastly.

"*Tell* me—has he asked you to marry him?"

To lie, and strongly, about it, is the first thing that occurs to Bridget—but then, lying being new to her, she revolts from it. Almost with the "no" upon her lips, she crushes it backward. And why should she perjure herself for either her or him?

"I refuse to be cross-questioned by you," says she, at once. "No," seeing the other about to persist, and with quite a royal gesture of her right arm, "not a word, do you *hear*? Not one word!"

Her whole attitude is so strong, so ear-

nest, that it subdues Theodosia. And Bridget, moving nearer to her, says :

“ You tell me you think Lord Luxford was in love with you—that but for my coming he would be *now* in love with you—is that so ? ”

Miss Gascoigne grows very pale. The calmness of Bridget, that might almost be called grandeur were she a little older, has frightened Theo into a *sort* of behavior—if only of a momentary lasting.

“ What I meant was,” says she, rather feebly, “ that—that *I* loved him, and that—that he—was beginning to—love me ! ”

This limp explanation she ends by covering her face with her hands. Bridget looks down on her with a curious wonder. To *give* her love where her love was of so small account ! To love—unasked ! Could such things be ? To the all-victorious Bridget, this small, violent, silly little girl

seems the very epitome of all the weakness of the world ! By her, and through her, and because of her, and such as her, are all women lowered in the eyes of men !

“ All this is nothing to me,” says Bridget, coldly, holding herself aloof, as it were—Bridget, who, when at home, is the very life of her surroundings ; who has the tenderest heart of all ; to whom her poor cling lovingly, knowing how keen her sympathy is for poverty and want and misery of all kinds ! “ You are a stranger to me—so is Lord Luxford. But, if I may say a word, and certainly you have laid yourself open to have words said to you, I should advise you to give up at once all thoughts of Lord Luxford.”

Theodosia turns upon her.

“ That you—that *you* may gain him !” *cries she*, in a shrill, angry tone that offends

Bridget's more cultured nature. "You mean to accept him, then?"

"You should try to control yourself," says Bridget, quietly, who has long ago decided that to lose one's temper with such a little fool as the one before her would be but a folly in herself. "What I mean is, that it will bring to you unhappiness to set your mind on Lord Luxford—because he certainly does not love you."

She has said it deliberately, feeling it would be a mean thing to go away and leave the girl in a fool's paradise. She could not bring herself to declare aloud Luxford's proposal to herself, but she felt she ought to warn the girl in some way.

Perhaps she had expected some sort of little explosion to follow on her words, but she is certainly not prepared for what does come.

White as a sheet, Theo looks at her.

Her little figure seems to have shrunk, and there are lines about her eyes and mouth.

“Is that your opinion,” says she, “your opinion of him? Now, hear mine of you—*you are a devil!*”

She says it all very softly, *very* softly at first, as if whispering it, but the sound of her own words destroys her calm. When she speaks again the calm is gone.

“Yes, you are a devil!” repeats she, violently this time, almost shrieking the unpleasant word. “I loved him—loved him! I *do* love him. And he loved me, until you came. You! You! . . . Oh! you . . . hateful—hateful— Oh! that I had strength to kill you. . . . Oh! to kill you!”

She breaks off, exhausted—a pitiable sight, standing there in her youth, her feebleness, with that dreadful desire for vengeance on her soft, small face. The very *childish* blueness of her eyes and the yellow

of her hair seem to make her wrath the more horrible.

Bridget looks at her.

"You'll make yourself ill, if you go on like that," says she, with a composure that contrasts strangely with the other's violence. "Try to calm yourself. I am sure you will be better alone." She walks toward the door.

"Come back. Don't go!" cries Theodosia, hysterically. "I *must* speak to you."

But Bridget, going out, closes the door firmly behind her.

CHAPTER XI.

“ So was my soul ; but when 'twas full
Of unrest to o'erloading,
A voice of something beautiful
Whispered a dim foreboding,
And yet so soft, so sweet, so low,
It had not more of joy than woe.”

SHE had kept wonderfully calm downstairs all through the hateful scene, but now, up here, alone with herself and her thoughts, and her memory of the girl's insolence, a little passion of rage shakes her. She almost laughs, as she tells herself that vengeance lies within her hand, and that tomorrow Theodosia shall learn of her engagement to Lord Luxford.

Yes, she will accept him ! There had *been* a few doubts in her mind up to this,

but now she casts those doubts behind her. She will marry him, if only to teach that girl a lesson. She wants one—in manners, at all events.

After all, why should she ever have hesitated? She *must* marry some day, and to be a countess will please Dad. And now that she has refused so many—— Yes, it will be a good ending, and she can help the girls. Somebody had told her the Luxford diamonds were very special, and diamonds are becoming. And there are castles—not only one, but two, and an exquisite old place in Surrey besides, and the mansion in Belgravia. Certainly, it is all well worth having. No wonder that little fool fought so hard for it!

Fool! Yes, fool! That is the only word for her, and what madness to wage war with a fool! Still fools should be taught!

She goes with a swift, still angry step to the dressing-table and lifts her arms to loosen her necklet. What is it all to her? She will go to bed—to sleep.

And then suddenly her arms drop to her sides. A word comes back to her—a last word—"Remember."

She stands quite quietly for a moment or so, and then, with a vehement gesture, she tears off the necklet, and lets it fall clattering upon the table.

Pshaw! as if there was anything to remember! He himself had declared memory void! Surely *he* has not remembered! He had almost advised her to marry Luxford!

And besides she had refused him. All that is over and done with. He *can't* care any longer, and "all that," from the very beginning, meant nothing, nothing at all really, and even if *he had* been in earnest—*why, that* would have meant nothing, either!

She has drawn all the hair-pins out of her hair now, and the whole rippling mass of nut-brown loveliness is falling round her. With a comb she draws it out, until its silkiness shrouds her as with a veil. She looks in the glass before her, and all at once it seems to her that there is another face there—a face that had so lately angered her.

But what a miserable face it is! Theo's face! Small, white, drawn—ghastly; with those cruel purple lines around the eyes and mouth. It seems almost an *old* face, as Bridget gazes at the photograph her memory has given. A little, foolish, pretty face!

With an impatient exclamation, Bridget throws her comb upon the table and turns back to the kindly fire. Thoughts crowd too thickly. That girl's face—and his face—and that last word!

She sits down in a chair and takes her knees into her embrace. This thing must

be thought out. There is mischief in this thing !

.
She has decided now. There is a tender light in the dark blue eyes—a sense of rest.

Yes, it is all over ! And she has given in. The lovely light deepens in her eyes as she tells herself that she had lied to her own heart when she had told it that Terence had forgotten—that the word “remember” was but as light as air ! That girl had called her “hypocrite,” and hypocrite she is—because she *knew*.

She *knew* that he loved her all the time. Even when he laughed and thrust her from him, still he loved her. And how bravely he had taken it all ! Without a cringe ! Not a knee to her ! She grinds her pretty teeth at this. Such defiance, though she *admires it*, angers her.

There is one thing certain, however—that she will never marry Lord Luxford. Theodosia may have him! Theodosia, whose small, venomous face still haunts her. Theodosia, who regards her as an enemy! And Theodosia is right, too; really she is her enemy! If she were to prove herself a friend to that little idiot of a girl, she would accept Luxford and take him out of her life forever. But such fine sacrifices, Bridget tells herself, are not for her.

No. She will not marry Luxford!

Now that she has come to this determination a sense of relief, of joy, overpowers her. She feels like one who has escaped from some dire fate! What a hateful mouth he has—and his eyes—— Truly, she *has* avenged herself on Theodosia—if it so chances that Luxford marries her.

It is an escape. Good heavens, if she had gone a step or two more—but now—

well, now she is free—at liberty to refuse him. She runs to her writing-table and scribbles a brief “No” on a sheet of paper, and encloses it in an envelope addressed to Luxford.

And now—what now? If she will not marry for money, what will she marry for? Well, *not* for money, anyway. And yet if she delays—may she not be tempted again? Why not put temptation out of her way?

Once again she takes up her pen—once again she scribbles a most laconic note:

“Come.”

To which in a day and a night as laconic an answer is returned:

“What is the good of my coming?”

Bridget, in a fine fury, answers this:

“*I thought you told me to ‘remember.’*”

Answer number two:

“Remember what?”

“You would come whenever I said I wanted you! But your promises are like pie-crust.”

There comes a third answer to this:

“I have changed my mind. I shall come now, on one condition only! And you *know it!*”

To this she wrote, in a white heat of anger:

“Come then! But I’ll pay you out for this; never fear!”


.

It took many days, naturally, for these warlike missives to be despatched between England and Ireland. And in the meantime

it is to-day—to-day, when Bridget, entirely self-possessed, comes down to breakfast, and, meeting Lord Luxford at the door of the breakfast-room, presses a little note into his hand while giving him the cheeriest of good-mornings.

Luxford, tearing open the note, finds the one word “No” inside it.

His first emotion is intense anger. He hesitates outside the breakfast-room, giving his rage full sway—but then—then he disbelieves. He, Luxford, to be refused! No. Little coquette that she is, she has played him this trick only to tighten the chain. Well—he will give her time to repent. He will let a good week go by before he renews his attentions to her, before he makes the final move that shall make her his. *Never* has he been more determined to marry her, and her only, as at this moment.



CHAPTER XII.

“ Into the sunshine
Full of the light,
Leaping and flashing
From morn till night.”

“ WOMEN are not what they used to be,” says the Professor, gloomily. He gives a push to his spectacles, and gazes at Bridget over them with an absorbed air. It is four o'clock, and through the windows of the library the dull light of the dying winter afternoon is lighting up softly the girl's mobile face.

She has evidently just come in from a brisk walk, has flung off her furs, but is still beautified by the big black hat that is the admiration of all the men and the envy of all

the women in the house. Where had she got it? In Dublin? Absurd! Poky little hole; and what good thing ever yet came out of Ireland?

Bridget is laughing; she has loosened the laces round her throat, and pulled off her long suede gloves. Frewman's lugubrious and dictatorial air seems to amuse her. There is a rather too sprightly light in Bridget's eye—it bodes ill for the Professor; she leans back with a delicate, if somewhat supercilious, grace against the old oak cabinet behind her, and draws her gloves languidly through and through her fingers.

"You shouldn't try to be funny," says she, shaking her charming head at him with quite an admonishing air.

"*Funny!*" It would be impossible to describe Frewman's air as he says this. *He recovers himself, however, almost im-*

mediately. "Funny! I have not, as a rule, been accused of frivolity."

"A good rule," says Bridget, going up to the fire. She leans one arm upon the mantel-shelf, and drawing up the front of her skirt, proceeds to warm one of the prettiest feet in Europe on the top of the fender. Having arranged herself entirely to her own comfort she looks back at Frewman.

"Frivolity wouldn't suit you," says she. "You are lovely in other little ways—the serious ways—but the billy-goat style would unpedestal you in no time."

"I have not much acquaintance with billy-goats," says the Professor, a trifle stiffly; "and I hardly see how they have come into this argument. I was making a few observations upon women, I believe."

"You made *one* observation," says Bridget, "and," with a genial smile, "I didn't like it."

"I could see that!"

"As a student of nature, you *would*," says Bridget, beaming on him. "And a very clever student you are, I have heard and can see. Still, never mind all that; let us come back to the original dispute. You said—I think—that——"

"That women are not what they were some years ago."

"Well, I suppose not. They would be older, for one thing," says Bridget.

"It isn't that—it is the age."

"Yes—well—age!" says Bridget, who is now beginning to enjoy herself tremendously. "I told you that they *would* age, you know."

"It isn't the mere span of life to which I allude," says Frewman, who is treating her most tenderly, and as a sort of out-door patient, a harmless lunatic, under which category, up to this, all women have seemed to

him to come. "It is the century—the march of *Time*. You are not without thought, Miss O'Neill, and therefore I repeat to you what I said just now, that women—er——"

"Up to date?"

"As you will"—resignedly—"are *not* what they were!"

"True! quite true!" says Bridget. "They are improved! Improved almost out of recognition!" She pauses; then throwing out her hands, and posing delightfully, with her head a little raised, so that the firelight falls full upon her perfect face, "Why, look at me!" says she, "I'm a specimen! *I'm* one of the improvements!"

"I am not discussing a part, but a whole!" says Frewman, keeping his head admirably, and brushing her remark aside as if it were a fly—a rather suicidal thing to do where

Bridget is concerned. "Not a mere unit, but a——"

"You mustn't call me names," says Bridget. "I'm *not* a unit—no," shaking her lovely head at him. "I'm *not*—and even if I *am*, I won't be called so by you, or anyone."

"Far be it from me," says the Professor, with a solemnity that enchants Bridget, "to call *you* names!"

"Except pretty ones!" encouragingly.

"I am no courtier," says Frewman, severely. "The inane, conventional remarks of the present day do not delight or suit me. I would return to our first argument. Fifty years ago women were——"

"Fools—slaves!" says Bridget, making a quick little movement toward him. "Now, look at me again! Look *hard*! Was I born to be a slave? No! I was *born to rule*!"

"I tell you," almost angrily, and refusing to "look hard"—"I do not deal with personalities."

"You will have to deal with this personality at all events," says Bridget, airily. "Now, what is it you want for me for this—delightful particular type of woman of the present day?" She throws herself into a chair with a little gay laugh, and, leaning on one of the arms of it, looks up at him with a wicked little provocation in her eyes. "Do you want me to sit in satin petticoats and a flowered sacque all day, and play the harpsichord, and spell sir with a 'u,' and never read at all, and call a beard a 'bird?'" She pauses. "By the bye," still looking up at him from under the big hat, "*you* have no 'bird!'"

"No," shortly.

"Ah! you should. All the ancient Britons wore them down to their toes."

"Never mind me," says Frewman, who is always so vigorously in earnest that he cannot now even stop to laugh a bit with the one human thing that in all his weary life has attracted him. "What I would point out is, that all that is bad has gone forward——"

"Oh! *not* the harpsichord," puts in she.

"And all that is good has remained stationary."

"True," says she. She looks at him; her eyes gleam, the demon of mischief overcomes her. "*You* are good," says she. A second later she covers her face with her hands. Remorse has seized upon her—a remorse that, I regret to say, is ornamented by a burst of wild, if unwilling, laughter. "Ah! forgive me!" cries she presently, parting her fingers, and looking at Frewman through them with a penitent little air.

"You *won't*, I know—but you ought. You called me a slave, you know."

"Oh, I think not."

"Well, something like it! And for an Irishwoman to be called *that*!"

"Ah, you *will* be personal," says the Professor. He smiles at last. Who could resist her, indeed? She has held out her hand to him in token of amity, and he had held it, forgetting to give it back, indeed, until she has lightly withdrawn it from his clasp. "You think me old-fashioned," says he.

"You see! I *said* it," cries she. "I knew you wouldn't forgive me. But old-fashioned! What a horrid word! I didn't say that. It is only I think that you were born too late. The time doesn't suit you. You are clever—dreadfully clever; I quite shiver before you—you have noticed that, haven't you?"

"No," says Frewman, grimly.

"Well, I *have*, for all that. But in spite of your cleverness, or, perhaps, because of it, you have stood still in some ways. You are now as you were when a boy of ten. You want every woman in the world to dress as your mother dressed, and to keep herself quiet. Yes, that is it—women should keep themselves quiet. But all that has quite gone out. Your mind is not progressive—you ignore the details; you should get up and *shake* yourself!" says Bridget, nodding her head.

"Shake myself!" says the Professor, who is now in the last throes of bewilderment. Can she—*can* she be accusing him, the learned, the celebrated, the accepted as a living light in all scientific circles, of being wanting in progression?

"Yes, as hard as you can!" says Bridget, with another lovely little nod. "When you

wake you will see your sins ! Why, you positively oppose the advance of any new thing. I have heard you talking about women to Mrs. Gaveston, and it has surprised me how she listened ! *I* should have boxed your ears. I don't care about the orthodox cry about women's rights myself, but I certainly think"—looking at him with a beaming smile—"that *I* am quite as useful a person in the world as you are ! You in your big way, I in my little, we each have our parts, and one is equal with the other."

"But——"

"Oh, no doubt equality is abhorrent to you ; but I warn you that *I*—and lots of 'I' will rule the world, *in a sense*, till time is dead. No ! I am not going to be shunted, even by you !" says Bridget, gayly. "I am I, as much as you are you, and we each can conquer our world. You consider woman as a mere cipher—like the grand,

the unspeakable Turk—but that is all wrong; and it comes of your never looking at the present moment, of your always dwelling on the musty past. One should learn to tolerate the present, to accept it, even if one is unfortunate enough not to be able to love it. I love it! One should look with hope to the future.”

“The future—who can know it?”

“Who *wants* to know it? Nobody but a fool!” says Bridget, with the kindest air. “And it is just because we *don't* know it we can hope. To look back is fatal, because if we looked forever we could not alter anything. Nothing stops or changes for one.”

“I said you thought me old-fashioned,” says the Professor, slowly, who is not so far gone in his abstruse studies that he cannot lose his heart to this frivolous, merry, many-sided creature before him.

"Then you said wrong. No, no, no! A thousand times no. But if I *may* say it—" She looks up at him for permission.

"Say anything you like," says Frewman. He has drawn closer to her, his usually pale face is paler now, his eyes are gleaming; with a little strange gesture he flings his spectacles onto the table behind him.

"Then, as you give me permission, I think you are *narrow*," says the girl, calmly.

"And you?" He has come even closer to her now. "What are you?"

"I am rude!" she says, slowly, with a second lovely penitence. Perhaps something in his manner surprises or warns her. She rises, not swiftly, but yet immediately, to her feet.

"You are beautiful!" says he, in a low, almost stifled tone. "*Too* beautiful! You are right! You rule! No, not a word. Don't shrink from me. I know. I under-

stand! You are outside and beyond me. I would to Heaven I had read less books and learned more of—of what might have made me acceptable in your sight.”

He turns to the door. Bridget, smitten to the heart, would have called to him—would have said some little thing—some word of kindness, but her tongue cleaves to the roof of her mouth.

While she is still struggling with her inner self the door is thrown open and a footman enters with tea. Tea, modern sacred rite, is held always in the library. Frewman would have left the room on the arrival of the servant, but just then Mrs. Gaveston comes through the doorway.

“Ah, you! dear Mr. Frewman!” says she, pleasantly. She looks from him to Bridget; it is a swift, scrutinizing, comprehensive glance. It tells her a good deal. *She has seen enough, at all events, to con-*

vince her that there has been a passage of some sort—and that with a considerable amount of tenderness in it—between that abominable Irish coquette and her (Mrs. Gaveston's) Professor! "And you, Miss O'Neill," nodding her head very friendly-wise at Bridget, who smiles back at her perforce, but with some difficulty.

"Yes, yes," says Bridget, hurriedly. "And here evidently I ought not to be, in this guise. I think I had better run away and take off my things."

So saying, she vanishes through the doorway.

"Dear girl!" says Mrs. Gaveston, sweetly, gazing after her. "So energetic always. Ah! that is one of the joys of youth!" She sighs. "To be energetic, untiring, always on the move. Ever seeking, and *almost* reaching, the secret of perpetual motion. Can't you fancy the pretty Bridget bursting

into a room just when one's thoughts were fixed upon an absorbing idea and scattering it to a thousand winds?" The widow lies back in her chair, and laughs gayly at this conceit of hers, while the Professor starts a little, and grows pale. His ideas! To be scattered. "She wouldn't even *know*," continues Mrs. Gaveston, still laughing and shaking her head. "Ideas are beyond the exquisite vitality that is hers."

"Still, she can think," says the Professor, slowly, whose late trouncing at the hands of Bridget is still fresh.

"Yes, yes, no doubt," says Mrs. Gaveston, agreeably. "She has, besides vitality, cleverness and beauty! I really think"—with a delightful little burst of enthusiasm—"that she is the dearest girl I have ever met. Don't you?"

"I feel so puzzled!" says the Professor, *laying his hand upon his brow.*

CHAPTER XIII.

“ Rabbi Jehosha used to say
That God made angels every day.”

THE lamps in the dancing-room have not yet been lit, but there is sufficient light from the blazing fire of pine logs to show up the gleaming beauty of the polished floor, the soft bunches of early daffodils that smile down upon it from their high perches on the brackets, and to reveal, to anyone who may wish to see it, the slender, exquisite swaying form of Bridget, as, in the half darkness, she dances over the glassy floor, alone, unseen, and brimful of happiness.

To dance, on this perfect floor, humming a waltz beneath her breath, is joy to her. There is a glorious vivacity in her move-

ments, a full and most sweet knowledge of youth, that betrays itself in every graceful turn and movement of her improvised dance.

The gleaming amber satin of her underskirt shines through the net above it, and makes faint, fairy-like shadows on the floor, as she softly, delicately dances to and fro, her arms a little outspread as though held by an imaginary partner.

To a young man, who has come to the doorway, the effect of the girl's dancing, thus silently, without sound of music, is almost uncanny. He moves a little forward involuntarily, as if to assure himself that it is she—Bridget—herself. Good heavens! if she were dead, and this her wraith! Yes, Bridget's wraith would be just like that—dancing, smiling, laughing always!

“Ah! you, Mr. Gascoigne,” cries Bridget, *not* stopping her dance, but letting it

take her up to him. She extends her hands to him. "Come, like me, to have a first turn? The first is always best, you know."

"*This* will be the best, certainly," says Gerald Gascoigne, as he puts out a willing arm to encircle her. She catches his hands, and holds him back for a moment.

"Think of a waltz before we begin," says she. "Don't *hum* it. Just let us think of one we both know, and then dance it, singing it in our minds. See? I've often done it before with—with an old friend of mine."

"A friend," says Gascoigne. He laughs, but looks keenly at her. "Friend is an elastic term. Just a friend—and nothing more?"

"Oh, a great friend!" says Bridget, so easily and gayly that any doubts Gascoigne might have had are killed.

"Now, we'll make it the 'Bayadère,'" says he, and presently they are waltzing as

happily as though the best band in Europe is at their service.

Bridget, stopping suddenly near the fireplace, laughs.

"*That's* an experience for you, isn't it?" says she.

"Every hour of my life has been an experience since you came here," returns he, laughing too. He seems in the humor to take things lightly; his eyes are brilliant, his head erect.

"You owe me something, then," says she, lightly. She pauses, as if suddenly grown a little uncertain of the wisdom of her words, and then goes on quickly, yet without awkwardness: "There is an old proverb, you know, about variety being charming, and if one is to have it *every* hour— Yes, you are in my debt. But never mind that"—gayly—"debts are horrible things. Put them behind you. What

of my gown, eh? How do you like it? I *want* it to look well to-night."

"With regard to a new conquest?" There is a quick note in his voice—it *might* be called jealousy.

"No, no. What nonsense! Of course not. Not new—certainly not. But now really, really" —leaning toward him, the firelight falling richly on her lovely face and darkening the sweetness of her eyes—"how am I looking? How do you like me in this frock?"

Firelight often plays tricks—now it seems to make Gascoigne a little pale. Yet again he laughs, *almost* naturally.

"If I were to tell you how I like you in every gown you wear, it would take time. Shall I?"

"There is no time!" says Bridget, hurriedly. Something in his eyes frightens her. What does he mean? "Another day. Yes, it would be interesting, of course;

each costume makes one so different. I can quite see that you could lecture freely on me—but—we'll put it off!"

"As you will," says Gascoigne. He comes closer to her, however, and, leaning against the edge of the lounge near the fire, goes on steadily, certainly, but with a vibration in his voice that makes her heart grow cold:

"There is something else I could tell you about, if you would listen," says he. "*Will* you listen, Miss Biddy?"

Poor Bridget! "Good gracious!" cries she to herself, "are they *all* going to propose to me?" Oh! these Englishmen! Her knees seem to weaken beneath her. Oh! where, *where* is Terence? What a wretch he is, not to be here by this time, to take her out of all her difficulties. Failed by Terence, she rushes madly into the *breach* herself.

“Miss Biddy! What a name!” cries she, with truly extraordinary merriment. “No, no. Not that! It brings back that novel of Lever’s so forcibly. You remember it? ‘Miss Biddy, the thing, you know, is at the door!’ No, I *won’t* be called Miss Biddy! Biddy, if you like, but not *Miss* Biddy!”

“To call you Biddy!” says the young man, slowly, so slowly that he gives Bridget time to awake to the fact that she has once again made a mistake. Gascoigne is looking at her. He is evidently intoxicated by her beauty. All mercenary ideas have faded from him. Even the vision of Claudia Ruthven, that a month ago shone like a star, now lies dulled, dead, forgotten. “To call you Biddy!” repeats he, dreamily. “May I? Could I dare? You give me permission?”

“Well, *hardly!*” says Bridget, who now is growing exasperated. How stupid all

these people are ! But Bridget's exasperations are so slight that she can always fling them to one side at a moment's notice, and now, seeing Gascoigne's face change with her words, she laughs afresh. "Why, what did you think?" says she. "I merely told you I couldn't and wouldn't be called 'Miss Biddy.' It is too historical a title for me. Anything but that! I should prefer that you should call me Biddy—Bridget—Bride—even—" she pauses—throws up her head in a little haughty fashion, though always smiling, and goes on in a meaning tone: "*Even* Miss O'Neill! rather than that!"

"I see!" says Gascoigne. "I accept it. The fiat has gone forth. Biddy! Bridget! Bride! *Miss O'Neill*, I beg your pardon."

"Now! Now! That is coals of fire!" says she, shaking at him her charming

head. "And I didn't mean quite that—but——"

"Never mind. I can supply the rest. And yet," says Gascoigne, "I would ask you something. In the future—some time—*any* time, do you think I might dare to hope that you would permit me to call you something a little less formal than Miss O'Neill?"

"The future! I hate the future!" cries Bridget, gayly. "The present for me. And we are wasting it. Come! let us dance again. And we will change the waltz this time. There is nothing like variety, you know—it is charming!"

Gascoigne smothers a sigh. It is a sigh, however, that would not have lasted even if he gave it full sway. How *could* one sigh with this lovely thing within one's arms? And even if she does like variety—if she be as fickle as undoubtedly she is fair—still,

still—the-ficklest mind finds its harbor at last.

There is, indeed, an almost fatuous smile of content on his face, when the door opens and a servant enters with lights. The servant is closely followed by all the other guests in the house, Mrs. Gaveston leads the way, followed by Miss Ruthven and Theodosia Gascoigne. Behind Theodosia Lord Luxford and Mr. Frewman may be seen.

Bridget, who is still dancing, comes to an harmonious pause, and beams loving smiles upon them all. Luxford, with a frowning brow, and Frewman, with a perplexed one, go straight up to her. Gascoigne holds himself with the air of a conqueror. As for the others, Mrs. Gaveston draws the two girls into the recess by one of the windows.

“It is—abominable—unbearable!” says *Miss Ruthven*. She of course has most to

bear, as, though the other two men had flown to Bridget on entering the room, still *they* had not been discovered waltzing with her, *tête-à-tête*, as it were.

“Have patience! Have patience!” says the widow. “These things always die a natural death. She *can’t* marry them all!”

“That’s all very well for you,” says Theodosia, with a whimper. “She isn’t likely to marry a dull old thing like the Professor!”

Mrs. Gaveston bends upon her a withering eye.

“She is much more likely—to do her her justice—to marry a man of intellect, than an idiot and a *roué*,” returns she, with sublime calm.

“She shan’t marry Gerald,” says Claudia Ruthven, between her teeth. It is a mere whisper. The others do not hear it.

In the meantime Bridget, brilliant, merry, lovely, is talking to the other three men

with that peculiar little air of hers that makes each recipient of her words believe himself the chosen one.

“Yes, we have been dancing! Haven’t we, Mr. Gascoigne? The shadow-dance was nothing to it. We felt like real ghosts? Not a sound save our footsteps, and they of course,” with a little laugh, “could not be heard. At least, *mine* couldn’t. Ah! Lord Luxford, you tarried too long!” with quite a special smile at him—or at least so he supposed it to be. “Were your neckties so *very* troublesome? As for Mr. Frewman—you don’t dance, do you, Mr. Frewman? Not often? Well, you shall dance with me to-night! I feel as if I shall dance like a fairy to-night—as if I could dance forever and ever.”

“I can’t dance,” says Frewman, sorrowfully. “But if, of your grace, you would sit *out a dance* with me——”

"Of course I shall. I shall *love* to sit out a dance with you," says Bridget, delightfully.

"What waltzes may I call mine, Miss O'Neill?" asks Lord Luxford, hastily.

"Oh! as for that——" says Bridget. She hesitates.

"They can't be promised yet, surely?"

"No, not yet. But——"

"Well, then, name those I may claim. I——"

He stops short, startled by something in the girl's face. What has happened? She is looking toward the doorway, and a great, lovely, brilliant light has rushed into her eyes. Never had those watching her seen that light before, though they had watched her many a time and oft.

"What is it?" says Gascoigne, fearfully. She lifts her hand.

"Listen!" says she. And then a step is

heard, and now here in the doorway stands Terence Blake, tall, beautiful to look upon, and with all his heart in the eyes he directs straight at Bridget.

“ Well, Biddy ? ” says he, in a low tone.

CHAPTER XIV.

“ And the third leaf sang, ‘ Be mine, be mine ! ’

And ever it sang, ‘ Be mine ! ’

Then sweeter it sang, and ever sweeter,

And said, ‘ I am thine, thine, thine ! ’ ”

BRIDGET gives a little cry—it is as like a low laugh as a cry, and suddenly—forgetful of everything—of those present—of what they will say or think—she runs straight to Blake, and flings all her slender, lovely body right into his arms.

The arms tighten round her.

“ You’ve come ! ” cries Bridget, a second later, taking herself out of his embrace, and giving him a little shake. “ A nice time you took to do it.”

“ Night and day, Bridget,” says he. He is not as composed as she is.

"Well, let us get away somewhere, away from these people, where I can scold you in safety," says Bridget, in a low tone, but unfortunately not so low but that the others can hear her.

Blake, taking her hand, leads her from the room.

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"Patience! I preached to you of patience," says Mrs. Gaveston, turning to the two girls, as Bridget disappears. "Now, follow me." In silence they follow her into an ante-room beyond, through which those in the ball-room must pass on their way to the other parts of the house.

In the ball-room, those three who are left behind look at each other furtively.

"Cousin, you know," says Gascoigne, *who is very pale* — the vaguest ghost of

a hope in his tone. "Some girls are so fond of their cousins—like brothers, d'ye see?"

"Yes—like brothers," says the Professor, dully.

"And she hasn't any brothers," says Gascoigne, "so naturally she would raise a cousin to that height of relationship. It seems to me," with extraordinary emphasis, "as clear as day. What do you think, Luxford?"

"It fatigues me to think," says Luxford, quitting the room abruptly.

"Disagreeable Brute!" says Gascoigne. "Hasn't an idea!"

They follow the Disagreeable Brute's lead, however, and quit the room. Passing through the ante-room, they find him there in company with Mrs. Gaveston, Theodosia, and Miss Ruthven.

Gascoigne goes up to Claudia.

"Will you give me the first waltz," says he.

"I have already promised it," says Claudia, with a curl of her lip.

"I am unfortunate! What waltz, then, may I hope to have?"

"I have promised them all," says Claudia, whereupon he turns upon his heel.

"I hope, Miss Gascoigne, you have kept even *one* dance for me," says Lord Luxford, approaching Theo.

"I had kept several," says Theo, her small, vindictive face alight.

"Ah! how good of you! I am fortunate indeed."

"Oh! did you *really* wish for them?" cries Theo, sweetly, venomously. "I am sorry. It was days ago since I reserved them for you, and lately—to-day, indeed—I fancied you would want them for Miss *O'Neill*, so I promised them to Mr. Drew!

You know. He was over here this afternoon."

Mr. Drew is a rich young landowner close to the Ingram estate, and decidedly *épris* with the pretty Theo. That she had *not* promised him those waltzes this morning goes without telling, but that he will be glad to get them on his arrival is also as sure a matter.

The Professor has strolled up to Mrs. Gaveston, who sweeps her handsome skirts aside and motions him to a seat beside her.

"You *do* look upset," whispers she, sweetly. "Sit here with me."

"But you will be dancing presently," says he, gloomily.

"Not if it will cheer my friend to have me beside him," says the widow, sympathetically.

"You will give up your enjoyment——"

"For you! You *know* I would!" says

the widow. "Now lean back and rest yourself, and let me place this cushion behind your head—is that comfortable? No—*don't* talk! I know what misery means. I"—sighing—"have been through it. Just rest there, and I will look after you."

.

Meanwhile, Bridget and Terence Blake have found their way into the deserted library, and are now looking at each other across the hearthrug. Blake is rather pale and cold, Bridget is full of life! Blake's eyes are questioning—Bridget's sparkling.

There can be no doubt, indeed, but that she is enraptured to see him. She had pushed him into a chair when they first got to the library, and told him to stay there till she heard everything about the girls, and Dad, and that. It seemed as if she could hardly talk enough to him at first, there *were so many* things to be remembered;

each day, each hour since they parted held some little tale that must be repeated.

She had too much to tell him, as it seemed! She would break off in the middle of a sentence to laugh with him at something else quite foreign to the matter in hand—laughing always, joyous, excited, but never, never once touching on the telegram that brought him here—never going within a mile of the magic word, *Love!*

Blake, who knows Bridget thoroughly, endures all this calmly for a time; perhaps there is sufficient joy in the mere fact of her presence and her undoubted pleasure at seeing him again to keep him patient for a little while. He has that first swift little rush toward him to dwell upon, he can still feel her in his arms, and as an actual thing there she is before him, leaning toward him, her lovely naked arms lying now prone upon her lap, now clasped around her knees,

now moving to illustrate some anecdote. The soft lights of the lamps are falling on her dainty head and lying upon the soft, amber gleamings of her gown! The dark, lustrous blue eyes are full of fire, the perfect lips are wreathed in smiles.

“She should be painted—painted just as she sits now,” says Blake to himself—“as Joy! She *is* Joy!”

Yet her joyousness displeases him. How *beautiful* she is! *Too* beautiful! She has almost killed his spirit within him.

“For thus I’m tempest-tossed,
A drifting skiff at most,
I dare the waves, risk cloud and rain,
I ever tempt my fate again,
Nor care if I be lost!”

He rouses himself with an almost angry movement and turns to her. He has risen to his feet.

“And now that I am here, Bridget—*what?*” demands he coldly, yet quickly.

“Well, that you *are* here!” says Bridget, lightly, easily, yet her face has paled. “That is such a delight,” says she, meaning to keep up the little pastime, but Nature fails her—her tone is quivering, uncertain.

“I have always been ‘here’ so far as you are concerned,” says Blake, with increasing coldness. “I merely ask you now to remember what your telegram to me meant, and what mine must have meant to you?”

“I wanted you to come,” says she—her lids have fallen over her eyes.

“That is not enough,” says Blake, icily. “You know the conditions on which I came. I thought you would respect them. What *do* you mean, Bridget?”

“That is what I never know,” says this terrible coquette, trifling with her happiness, even at its last hour.

"You will have to know, and *at once*," says Blake, sternly. "Do you mean to marry me—or do you not?"

"Oh! what a question!" says Bridget, reproachfully. She is leaning against the table, and gives him a swift, irresistible glance from under her lowered lashes.

"Answer me!" says he, immovably.

Bridget fidgets a little, letting her soft, white, pretty arms fall to her sides, the fingers of which interlace themselves in a thousand nervous fashions.

"Do you hear, Bridget? If you can't answer me, I shall understand—I shall go—I shall not return."

Still Bridget stands silent, twisting and twisting her slender fingers.

Blake, his face set and white as death, marches straight to the doorway—he has, in fact, his hand upon the door when Bridget *gives way*.

"Oh! don't! *Don't* go!" cries she, a little wildly. "Terence"—she runs to him—"oh! how I *hate* you!" cries she, and flings herself into his arms!

.

"You mean it, Bridget?" asks he, presently.

"Oh! of *course* I mean it," says she, petulantly. "Just look at my *eyes*. Do you think I should cry like that if I *didn't* mean it? How on earth am I to appear this evening?"

"You're looking all right," says Blake. "Not a soul would notice you; you look"—softly—"beautiful!"

"Do I?" she gives him a shy little glance. "You have forgiven me?"

"In part!" As he says this he belies himself, for he takes her head very, *very* gently between his hands and kisses her on her eyes and lips.

"Oh, *no!* entirely! And you shouldn't be hard on me; because, after all, Terry, if I had persisted in thinking I didn't care a bit for you, *I* should have been the one to suffer most."

"No," says Blake. "No, Bridget."

"Yes, I should, I should certainly. Because you would have worried for a little bit and then married and been happy ever afterward—whereas I might have married at once, and worried afterward, and *never* have been happy."

"I should never have married, Bridget. I should have broken my heart," says Blake, slowly.

"Well, I should have broken mine, too," says Bridget, "so we are quits there. Oh, Terry," she slips her arms round his neck and presses her cheek to his; "aren't you glad, darling, that we *needn't* break our hearts?"

Mr. Blake's reply is unworthy of record. No one ever heard it! Yet it must be admitted that, if wanting in *sound*, it is by no means wanting in vigor.

"You *do* love me, Bridget? you do honestly love me, my soul?"

"Oh! I'm just *tired* of loving you," says Bridget, giving him an angry little shake.

.

Poor Lady Ingram had the terrible task of announcing the engagement. It was a short one! Everyone says young Mrs. Blake is the loveliest woman alive, and, more than that—the happiest.

Lord Luxford has gone abroad; they say he is a perfect terror to the grislies, and that no Indian born can stand before him. Gascoigne is at Constantinople, winning all hearts. To support this *on dit* it may be added that he spends the best part of his time in inveighing against the advantages of

married life. All women admire this style of conversation—it inevitably leads to the altar!

As for the Professor, he has been married to Mrs. Gaveston for the last four months, and is, I have heard, the very picture of content.

THE END.

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